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BY

MRS. VICTOR RICKARD

AUTHOR OF "YOUNG MR. GIBBS," "THE FIRE OF GREEN
BOUGHS," "THE HOUSE OF COURAGE," ETC.

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" That wasteful trick of yours, that gust prodigious
Of dreams too great for their comparison,
Blew stars ablaze, but drowned us in the ditches.
Sad, generous, valiant, tired ephemeron !
Had we but coined the vision when it shone
We too had ruled, and mocked the dispossessed.
Well, we have the rags, the prudent have the riches—
We have not lived as wisely as the rest."

T. M. KETTLE.

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CHAPTER I

THE fire was burning rather low, for Monica Henstock was never lavish with coal, and the temperature in her sitting-room had fallen perceptibly. Her room was decorated in hard greens and greys, and none of the easy chairs were really deserving of the title, but the effect was tidy and excessively neat, and Monica herself was the acme of tidiness. A lamp with a hard green paper shade threw a circle of light on to her writing-table, and all her letters were put away into packets, marked respectively "Answered" or "Unanswered," and no one who knew Monica ever suspected her of mixing the one with the other. She had come early to her sense of power, and had taken her degree as a Bachelor of Medicine with real distinction, and the contrast between her *métier* and herself was sufficiently striking to make her interesting.

In figure, she was slender and rather frail, and her fine, mobile features had an original and almost mystic suggestion. Her mouth drooped at the corners, and she was full of abstract ardours. Since she began to think for herself, which was very early in life, as these things count, she had flung herself into extremes, and fought for a number of causes. Studied closely, it was possible to discover that there was a deep strain of morbidity in her, which induced her to dwell upon the ugly, dangerous side of things, and her training had accentuated her natural tendency. The force with which she was able to express herself was lightened by her attractive smile, showing white regular teeth, and her small head was crowned with a wealth of thick red hair. She was by no means the stereotyped professional woman, and even though her room had all the rigidity of a consulting-room, Monica conquered it, unconsciously, because she was essentially feminine. Her views on life, men, women and marriage, on the social questions of the day, were defiant, not to say bombastic. Life, to her, was not so much a battle-ground as a platform, and she lectured whenever opportunity arose. She was thirty-two but looked younger. Without her special distinction she would have been dowdy, but with it, her total lack of *chic* became an asset.

On one side of her nature she was careful, hard-working and steady, and this had brought her early success; and, on the other, she was an emotionalist, given to great friendships with other women, and unconsciously susceptible where men were concerned. In fact, Monica knew less of herself than most of us, and while she believed that she was a merciless antagonist, she was, actually, quite unusually vulnerable on the side of sex. But Monica had "made good." She ranked with the men whom she affected to despise, and she was of real use in the world.

Her small house in Colebrook Street, off Cavendish Square, was well known, and her engagements, apart from hospital work, were almost more than she could deal with.

She had her scorns, feeling she had earned a right to be scornful, and some over-indulgence in this respect had pulled down the corners of her flexible mouth. Yet, behind all this, the real Monica craved for another life, which included love and rapture. Women came to her in shoals, but men, unless her own colleagues, were rare in her life; when they did appear, the hidden Monica peered out, and the Monica that she believed herself to be had to invent fictions to account for the fact that she always preferred them before her own sex.

She was standing by her writing-table talking to her greatest friend, Cathy Rossiter, and Cathy was grumbling at the excessive angularity of the chair in which she was sitting.

Why they were friends was one of those strange, psychological puzzles which no one understands, and can only be explained through the fact that they had been schoolfellows.

Cathy had everything. Monica frequently dwelt on the subject with a hint of rancour in her heart. Everything she wore suited her, and her easy grace was a poem. Sir Neville Rossiter, her father, had left her well provided for, and she had the type of beauty which proclaims itself to the whole world. She was not neat, she was careless to untidiness, and yet she commanded the full joy of the most critical observer. Her hair was wavy and brown, and her eyes wide and very blue. Her beauty of feature was even less than her beauty of expression and the frankness of her smile. Cathy touched the human being in every one, and there was a dash and gallantry in her bearing which called for an immediate response. No one could grudge her her good fortune in life, because she herself was so generous. In fact, the whole of Cathy was just her lavishness. She held out her arms to the world, smiled at it, and asked to be a friend, for she was entirely herself. Monica counted everything. She knew what she spent on stamps; she knew what she had at the bank, and she knew to a halfpenny how much small change there was in the voluminous bag which she carried when she went out. With Cathy, everything was otherwise; she hadn't the least idea what her yearly expenditure amounted to, and never troubled about it; she said she had "holes in all her pockets, mental and material," and Monica suspected that her gloves and stockings were probably in the same condition.

Cathy was an aristocrat by birth, a democrat from choice, and Monica came from a steady middle-class home, and felt an inward satisfaction to know that the Rossiters were socially above her, though she would not have admitted it under torture. When Cathy laughed, no one in the world who listened could remain altogether serious. She knew her own world well, and at the age of twenty-eight she still remained unmarried. Love had come to her, and she had lived through a whole avalanche of entreaty. She had been sought by great and small alike, and was as invincibly attractive as a woman well can be. Yet no one had come who had ever captured her whole undivided love, though she had always responded in a measure. You could no more keep Cathy from showing that she was glad to be loved than you could keep her from breathing. Without being a flirt, in the accepted meaning of the term, she flirted desperately and unconsciously, and she was perpetually interested in men.

Towards Cathy's long list of suitors Monica adopted an attitude of amused scorn. She could not believe that it all happened without overt act on the part of her friend, and she decided that Cathy's wiles were well considered, and her effects the result of considerable care and attention. It gave her a further sense of superiority, and she looked down upon Cathy as though from a cold and distant height, where she stood, proud, lonely and aloof. Cathy got mixed up in one affair after another, and her public was masculine. Furthermore, Cathy believed in men, and Monica hadn't a good word for them.

Cathy lay back in her chair, looking at her friend with her soft blue eyes, her feet stretched out to the wretched fire.

"I ought to be getting ready to go to the reception at the American Embassy," she said in her wonderfully modulated voice. "Aunt Amy warned me that I was to go with her."

Monica put down a thermometer which she had been looking at; a newly invented thermometer of which she approved, and she intended to write a letter, expressing her approval, to the inventor. She sat down by the table.

"I sometimes wonder," she said reflectively, "if you are always honest with yourself, Cathy. You profess very extreme views, and yet you are walled about with Debrett. Lady Carstairs usually gets you to agree to be present at most of these functions, either in her house or elsewhere. Are you sure that you don't appreciate them more than you admit?"

Cathy gave a stifled yawn.

"You see, she is my aunt, and I live in her house. One has to be civil. Even you would make that concession, Muggins. I am a trial, but, when I can, I do my best."

Monica nodded silently. She was never sure whether she altogether liked the adaptation of her name, a relic of school days, and she said nothing.

"Aunt Amy is a dear," Cathy went on, "and she often agrees with me. She is absolutely devoid of snobbery at heart, and at least there is none of that in the house."

Monica put a log on the fire carefully as she spoke. "You must come to the 'Epoch' Club. We had a splendid meeting there"—she grew enthusiastic as she recalled it—"crowds of men and women, all determined to get their rights."

"Rights," Cathy said, repeating the word, and immediately giving it the value of her own voice. "I hate the fever of the 'Epoch.' They are destructive."

Monica went back to her chair, and looked round her room thoughtfully.

"We can't do things by a rule of smash," Cathy continued, turning a large diamond ring on her finger. "Teach people honour and integrity, and you get every single reform that is needed, here."

Monica shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I know," she said, and her mouth drooped at the corners. "You are only an echo of the old order; a dreamer. I belong to the people who act. Even when I began to work for my degree, women were at a wretched disadvantage."

Cathy smiled and looked at the fire. She knew Monica's difficulties, for she had heard them all countless numbers of times.

"Have you heard anything of Lilian?" she said, turning her head and looking at her friend. "She has the courage of her opinions."

"Yes, and it's taking her to the Divorce Courts," Monica replied, picking up some knitting and working at it rapidly. "I agree that it's all no one else's affair, but the question, in my mind, is rather whether one has to stand by one's friend, or stand on a general principle."

Cathy held out her beautifully shaped hands to the blaze, and considered the question.

"Robert made her life wrong for her," she said slowly. "I don't see how either you or I are to decide. It is simply ugly to be unfaithful or promiscuous, but we both realise that Lilian is neither. It isn't easy for any woman to give up all she is giving up; I can't see your difficulty; she needs her friends."

Monica patted her thick plait and continued her knitting.

"I don't wish to see our standard go down to the level which is good enough for men," she said, a touch of anger in her voice. "Surely you feel the same, Cathy?"

"I'm not a judge, or even a juryman," Cathy said, with a soft little laugh. "It is always easy to accuse the woman of selfishness. All the martyrs of the marriage service are open to that jibe."

"If it is a real thing, of course," Monica said, flattening out her work over her knee, "it is different; but if it is only sheer love of excitement——"

A ring at the door interrupted her as she spoke, and both women looked up.

"I expect it is the car," Cathy remarked, "but there's no special hurry. It never takes me long to dress."

"Do try to be tidy," Monica said, glancing at her with an indulgent smile; "put plenty of hairpins in, Cath."

"Hairpins, safety-pins and common pins," Cathy replied. "How would one get on without them? I trimmed this hat," she picked it up from a chair, "without threading a needle. It's rather a success, and I think it suits me."

She got up, and began to collect a number of her belongings which she had strewn around her when she came in, and was still looking approvingly at her hat when the door of the room was opened, and a woman of about the same age as Monica stood there and smiled at them. She was tall, dark and graceful, and there was a slight suggestion of hardness round the lines of her clever mouth. Her eyes were intelligent, and she had a very marked touch of defiance in her manner, even though she held out both hands to Monica and Cathy.

"Lilian!" Cathy said impulsively, as she kissed her. "We were just talking of you." She threw down her hat again, and Lilian Amyas took a chair which Monica pushed to the centre of the circle of light. "Muggins was trying to be judicial, weren't you, Mug? And we had actually begun at last to discuss clothes—or rather pins."

The new-comer sat down and drew off her gloves, and she looked at Cathy, and then at Monica.

"Am I to make a confession of faith?" she asked quickly. "I've been doing it for weeks, but I'm prepared to repeat it all over again."

"There is such a thing as principle," Monica remarked. "You can't sweep away the need of discipline, it gives one confidence."

"And how about the price of compulsion?" Lilian asked, with the same touch of being on the defensive. "Indiscriminate obedience is shameful."

"Tell me about the man," Cathy said, leaning forward and giving her friend's arm a kindly squeeze. "I know Robert, and I don't know Anthony. Let me begin well, Lil, by seeing him through your eyes."

"I heard that he did well in France," Monica said, taking up her knitting again.

"And came out of it without a decoration," Lilian added. "He hasn't been much in England, and is hopelessly out of place in a drawing-room."

Cathy leaned back, her eyes interested, and watching her friend closely. Bit by bit, Lilian built up the presentment of Anthony Hinton. A big, dark-haired man, with a strong voice, who had fought his way through life with bare fists.

As she presented him to her friends, Lilian's eyes grew bright, and her quick words followed rapidly one on the other. His grit, his sense of honour, and his courage; all these things were known of him, for he was perfectly fearless and perfectly unselfish.

When she finished speaking, both Monica and Cathy were silent. Cathy was thinking of Robert, with his tremendously exotic manner, his white spats and effeminate hands, even the bottle of aspirin he always carried in his pocket. He had been engaged in literary work during the war; writing up articles from collected reports, and also writing a little poetry. His educated voice was always pleasant to listen to, even when he said very trifling and silly things.

Robert desired that his wife should paint her face and look like a *demi-mondaine*, and when he read his poems, he did so by the light of two altar candles. He felt sure that no good thing ever came from anywhere but Eton and Oxford, and as he had been the product of the school he loved, he was quite sure of his own worthiness. You could hardly treat Robert very seriously, and yet, once he stood between Lilian and this bushranger of hers, he became such a problem. He had never liked the idea of Lilian working in a canteen. The word, he said, was so "hopeless." If it had been called almost anything else he could have borne with it, and, as though his forebodings had some real ground for existence, it was there that Lilian met Anthony, who was then neither more nor less than a trooper.

How did one adjudicate between Anthony and Robert? And once Anthony had come in, how could Lilian go back to sit in Robert's holy of holies when he wrote his verses?

Cathy was always sorry for the weak, while she admired the strong, and she wondered again as she looked at Lilian. She was fighting for a phase of liberty, but, as Monica said, how then did one grapple with the question of principle in the abstract?

Cathy drew a long breath.

"You could hardly help loving him if he is like that," she said, feeling, as everyone feels when questions become personal, that it is the people involved who count.

"It's a mercy he is not neurotic," Monica remarked in a professional voice. "Anyhow, Lil, I hope you will be happy and not become disillusioned." She had her own views about Robert, and he interested her, because she felt that he was slightly abnormal.

Lilian looked at the fire. She was well aware that a gulf was widening between them, and she did not very greatly care. Cathy could be trusted to stick to a friend through anything, because she was sympathetic and always fought for a lost cause; Monica might or might not. She would not break off suddenly, but after a time you would find that she had drifted out of range. Her enthusiasms were all public, and she openly admitted that she gave herself to bigger questions than mere personal difficulties.

"I shall dream about him to-night," Cathy said, as she took up her hat again, and fixed one or two reluctant pins, for the car had been announced.

"You'll be far too much interested in the last man you have met," Monica remarked, with the slightest touch of a claw hidden under a velvet pat on the cheek. "You are incorrigible, Cathy, and always will be."

Cathy turned at the door and looked back at her friends; she had some innate quality lacking in them both, and it shone through her, star-like, intangible, but very real.

"She is such a darling," Lilian said, as she left them with a gay wave of her hand.

"She uses too many pins," Monica replied, "both in her clothes and in her ideas."

"I don't think I agree." Lilian sat down again. "I ought to be going, Muggins; it's late, isn't it?"

"One day," went on Monica, "she will marry her cousin, Lord Twyford, and play at Socialism—ask the servants to tea, and make everyone awkward and uncomfortable. Cathy's Socialism is also put on with pins. Obviously she must marry Twyford."

"Cathy doesn't bother to understand anything except her own feelings, that is what makes one so sure about her," Lilian said, preparing to depart.

"The very last reason for being sure of anyone," said Monica.

CHAPTER II

Cathy was late in getting back and late in getting dressed. Her aunt's maid, who admired her tremendously, could only wring her hands. There was no time to do her hair properly, and, though her dress was ready for her, Cathy managed to tear some of the saxe-blue films in which she was shrouded, so that her beautiful shoulders shone whitely under the gauze which covered them; and she was reduced to falling back upon pins, as they were preferable, in the eyes of Lady Carstairs, to unpunctuality.

There was a brilliant crowd of celebrities at the Embassy that evening, and Lady Carstairs and Cathy were soon divided one from the other.

Cathy looked around her, with her usual quick interest in crowds of every kind, and found herself near Jerry Hazen, one of the secretaries, a man she always liked. He was tall and spare, and when he smiled he closed his eyes, a little trick which amused Cathy and made her watch for it.

People flowed past and around her, and whenever she began to talk to Hazen she was immediately interrupted by someone else, who wanted to say that it was cold, or that the reception was unusually crowded; and, at last, she made a bid for freedom, and Hazen took her to a low seat in a secluded corner. He felt that he was more or less in love with Cathy, and he was always elated and excited to be near her. A bit of her hair had come down, and he wondered whether or not he ought to tell her, as he watched her face. She was looking at the room, just beyond the alcove, and she was for the moment unconscious of him.

"Who are you searching for?" he asked. "I shall be jealous in another minute, Miss Rossiter."

She turned her look of immortal mirth towards him.

"No one and everyone," she said. "I always love a crowd. It's full of secrets."

The group outside the alcove broke up as Amyas, who was standing just outside, turned and peered in at them. The band was playing the National Anthem, and the guests in the room beyond had all been standing to watch the Great People go by, for they were going away.

"Cathy," he said, and he laughed. "Cathy, by George." He came towards them delicately. "There's a rod in pickle for you," he said, laughing at her, and holding up an admonitory finger. "She has been talking about God, I'm sure of it, it's her obsession." He put his hand on Hazen's shoulder. "Quite mad on the subject, aren't you, Cathy?"

"I'm not a monopolist," she said. "God belongs to every one."

"I haven't believed in that fiction since I was twenty," Robert remarked with a shrug, and then he laughed again. "Gods, if you will; gods who loved like men and sinned like men."

Cathy looked at him and shook her head. "You're not even a good modern, Robert, if I must believe you. You're trundling along, centuries back—a hopeless reactionary."

Again their eyes met, as Hazen wished her good night—there was no use staying on to be *de trop*.

"You can't go yet," Robert remarked to her as he sat down. "Twyford must wait. Are you really going to marry him, Cathy?"

She laughed, and shook her head.

"I have other things to do than think of marriage," she said, with her quick, living eyes on his dark, thin face.

"I'll bet anything that you encourage every man Jack of them all." Amyas half closed his eyes, and smiled. "You can't help it. At present you are hypnotising me, and adding me to the list."

"Why in the world should I want you?" she said, touching his arm. "My dear Robert, humility is a virtue which you certainly don't seem to possess."

"I shall be what's called 'a free man' soon," he replied, and his mouth twitched slightly at the corners. "Have you seen anything of my airy, fairy Lilian?"

"I saw her to-day." Cathy lowered her eyes. No one could logically be expected either to respect or love Robert, but he was hurt, and she felt for him at once.

"She is in love, as you know, with a creature of beef and muscle."

"Be fair, Robert, be fair." Cathy's voice was imploring.

"Oh, these things happen," he said, with an assumption of indifference; "I am quite calm about it. Some people like beefsteak, and, if they do, well, I suppose they must have it. She will be bored stiff—then, by God, Cathy," he laughed his sophisticated laugh, "she'll give him hell. A sweet-tempered woman, Lilian; you might guess that by the set of her chin."

"Lil is one of my greatest friends," Cathy said, with a touch of frost in her voice. "I think it was rather wonderful of her to have stuck you as long as she has, Robert. You aren't an easy man to get on with."

"She has my best wishes and congratulations," he said idly; "it will be amusing enough for all our friends."

Cathy considered for a second, and then she spoke very earnestly.

"Are you really a righteous man yourself? You're so shadowy, that I often can't catch hold of you at all. You say you are a pagan, yet, now that your own roof is menaced, you see the use of laws, and so on. When you are dying, you will send for the nearest clergyman to come and say prayers. That's the kind of man you are."

Amyas sat up and looked at her, as though her words had stung him into some feeling of anger, and then he decided it was too much trouble, and he subsided again.

"A woman can't afford to do things of the kind," he said, in his slightly complaining way. "Lilian will get it in the neck, socially. She should have shown more gumption."

"Conquer herself for the sake of the conventions, in fact?" Cathy's voice was scornful.

"Oh, call it that, if you like. A little common sense would be all to the good."

"If you said that she was bound to stick to a principle," Cathy spoke with growing warmth, "then I could understand you."

She thought, with a kind of historic vision, of the crowded masses of men and women who had placed an ideal, clear to them if not to the rest of the world, above all else. Intensely human, they thronged the road of life, with their red passions and burning wrongs, their frenzied rights, their fighting and their death, all carried through in the very world where she herself now stood.

"You discard principle, and, though you laugh at convention, you profit by it in this case and are glad."

"Laugh? Of course I laugh. I laugh at a policeman, for instance; you can't expect me to do anything else with him; but, all the same, when a thief steals my spoons, I call him in. Common sense again."

"Now you are back to property rights," she retorted. "This man of Lilian's couldn't *steal* her; she is an individual and decides for herself."

Robert laughed again.

"Forgive me, Cathy," he said, "but I am thinking of you and Twyford, later on, when you do marry him, as you certainly will. He has his own ideas."

Cathy was thinking again, watching the people in the room beyond.

"It's the different standard," she said suddenly; "that's where the whole thing tumbles to bits. Before you married Lilian, were you a Puritan, Robert?"

"I may have been," he said, half closing one eye, with a kind of lazy impertinence. "I knew my way about, Cathy, if that's what you are driving at."

"You were just a rather nasty little boy, and you grew nastier as you went on."

"Cathy, do be reasonable. I wasn't any different to the others." Robert spoke in tones of exasperation.

"You haven't the smallest right to say a word," she said. "What have you been teaching Lilian since you and she were married? Love of honour, high aims, love of the poor or the helpless? Love of a clean name, of any real beauty?"

"'Here the speaker was interrupted by loud cheering,'" Amyas commented. "Let me remind you, Cathy, that we live in London, and not in Hyde Park. By the way, do you mean that I am a coward and a hypocrite? It isn't very civil of you."

"You have the backing of your own kind," she said scornfully. "It's wrong, dreadfully wrong somewhere." She sighed, and opened her fan.

"I loved Lilian," he said, glancing at her lowered eyes, "and it's not altogether easy to forget her. Give me credit for that much sincerity."

It seemed as though he was going to say something further, when Cathy looked up and saw that her cousin was coming towards her. He was a man of middle height, with a bright colour and fair hair. Twyford was curiously indifferent, and his indifference invaded every region of his mind, except that inhabited by Cathy; he did not care what happened to anyone else. He never spoke in public, though he was a hereditary legislator, and had never wished to assist any cause, nor had he done so, and yet he was steady and right-minded. Women, in dozens, had tried to marry him, and he had once been in love, before Cathy's day dawned, when he had shown all the necessary common sense, and no one had been much the wiser when it all ended.

His coming made an end to further talk between Robert and Cathy, and silenced her longing to say to Amyas that, if he had really loved Lilian or loved her still, he would not be thinking of what the world was going to do, the conventional world, to which he boasted himself superior. He hadn't even an angry god to stand at his side, but he was glad, because, as it were, he knew that there were butchers about who slaughtered reputations. But he did not dwell in the green pastures, and no one had said to him, "My peace I give unto you."

Robert hailed Twyford once he saw that his coming was inevitable, and Cathy rose to her feet. He watched her as she smiled at her cousin. Trust Cathy to smile at a man. She smiled so readily—too readily, he fancied.

"I'm so sorry"; she became repentant at once, and Twyford stared at her, as was his habit.

"Aunt Amy has got the jumps," he said; "she wants to leave, and, as usual, can't find you. You've been like a needle in a bundle of hay to-night."

"Do think of an original simile," Cathy said, turning a valedictory smile towards Amyas. "Good night, Robert, I'm glad we had a talk."

"It was a very one-sided affair," he replied, rocking himself a little on his long legs. "Cathy's preparing to take Holy Orders, Twyford; it's a bit of a bore."

"We shall be the last to leave as it is," Twyford said impatiently.

"Well, what if we are?" Cathy retorted. "It shows how much we enjoyed the evening."

CHAPTER III

THERE was trouble and commotion in the house of Lady Carstairs; the big, spacious house in Cavendish Square.

Properly speaking, the trouble belonged to the schoolroom quarters, but it had leaked painfully through, like some trickle of ugly colour, and made its way elsewhere. The governess, Miss Batten, who was there to superintend the training of Elizabeth and Constance, Lady Carstairs' twin grand-daughters, was young and pretty, in a colourless fashion, and led a secluded existence in the dim land that stretches between the employer's own domain and the servants' hall. It was rather a dull place for a young girl, and when kind Lady Margaret Roper gave a small dance, she suggested that Miss Batten might be allowed to be numbered among the guests. It all should have turned out well, because the motive was a good one, if Miss Batten had not lost her ridiculously fluffy head. She had, one may suppose, lived too much on dreams, and to get away from grammars was in itself too intoxicating for such as she. Lady Carstairs regarded her kindly before she left, and made one of her usual remarks. Everyone who knew Lady Carstairs knew what she was likely to say. She said, "it never rains but it pours," and that, "there are always faults on both sides"; she also said that "marriage is a lottery," and that "truth is stranger than fiction"; and she made some statement of the same kind when luckless Miss Batten was swept off in pursuit of pleasure.

Miss Batten enjoyed the dance. She knew no one when she got there, and Lady Margaret introduced her to a man who also knew no one. He had been brought by Mr. Otho Adamson, a young and rather headlong nephew of the hostess. The man, whose name, it transpired, was Taylor, was a tall, garish individual; a person whom you might hesitate to introduce to a *débutante,* but quite suitable for a governess. Otho admitted afterwards that he knew him at his Club, believed that he came from Australia, and that, as he had been instructed to find enough dancing men, he had, on an impulse of hospitality, requested the lanky stranger to "come along." He had once given him a reliable tip at Doncaster, and—here Otho fell back on the excuse that you expected people to know how to behave.

Soon after the early part of the evening had gone through, Miss Batten, and the man from Australia called Taylor, had disappeared, and when the eager dancers were still hard at it, dancing to "God Save the King," she was still absent. In the end she did appear, in company with Mr. Taylor, who looked, so report had it, more like the Flying Dutchman than ever, and Lady Margaret, alone in the empty drawing-room with its lights nearly all extinguished, took a grim farewell of her.

Next day Lady Margaret called on Lady Carstairs and spoke to her quite frankly. She did not think Miss Batten could exercise "a good influence over girls." This was paying Miss Batten rather a handsome compliment, for she had never influenced any living being in all her hapless days. Lady Carstairs felt distressed, and said that "there were faults on both sides," and that "it was never too late to mend," and decided to hush up the whole thing. Cathy took the part of the governess, and blamed Lady Margaret for handing her over to a man with a large nose and a heavy moustache, who looked as if he had dined too well; and so the incident passed into oblivion and Miss Batten was pardoned.

"She must have been very hysterical," Lady Carstairs said, when she described the interview to Cathy, "because she said she 'wished she had been dead' before she went to dear Margaret's little dance. What an odd thing to say."

Time went on, and Miss Batten with it, and time also disclosed the inevitable truth, and the morning after the reception at the American Embassy, Lady Carstairs was called to her governess's room, to find that Miss Batten was ill. The nature of her illness was so shocking, that Lady

Carstairs forgot to say that it was the unexpected which always happened.

"She has told me everything," she said, sitting down near the fire in Cathy's room. "It was that disreputable friend of Otho's. He is probably married. I believe all Australians are before they leave their own country, and, in any case, a man who would behave like that——"

"Couldn't be trusted to marry any woman," Cathy said. "I quite agree with you, Aunt Amy."

"Not that at all, my dear," Lady Carstairs replied. "If he could be induced to, it would be a blessing in every way; but I rang up Otho, who knows nothing whatever about him, nothing *whatever*—oh, really, it is very dreadful."

"Something must be done for poor Batkins," Cathy said, getting up and standing by the fire.

She was thinking of the hundreds and hundreds of newly created spirits who came into the world day after day; wasn't it Mr. H. G. Wells who had seen a vision of a stream of babies pouring down a pipe into a gutter?

"I'll go and see Monica," she said, "when I have talked to Miss Batten. Monica will know what it is best to do with her."

"She behaved dreadfully badly, and of course the girl is ruined," Lady Carstairs said sadly; "yet, really, Cathy, who could have foreseen such a thing? Margaret acted out of kindness, and one expects people to behave decently."

Cathy hurried out of the room, and went upstairs to Miss Batten's landing. She felt that the governess was faced by the most awful punishment which can fall upon living woman, and for the sake of what? What had she been thinking of? How could she? The man was, so she had heard, a coarse looking creature, with hot eyes and a grin. How could it be explained within the limits of reason? She, who had everything to lose by such a hazard, and nothing whatever to gain. Did some madness possess her, or had the airless civilisation and gentility of her lot reacted suddenly, and had she leapt full into an hour of wild revolt, desecrating her altars and dancing on the lesson books—and all under Lady Margaret's roof? Any sane person might be capable of an hour of madness, but the price of it, in this case, was staggering.

Knocking at Miss Batten's door, she went in, and found her sitting by the fire, dejected and wretched, her face smeared with crying and her eyes heavy with grief. There should be something which one ought to be able to say to help her. Was it any use to tell Miss Batten that "morality was merely a geographical condition," and that, in some other country, she wouldn't be regarded as a pariah? Miss Batten raised her bruised eyes and looked at her, out of the depths.

"Batkins," Cathy said, crossing the room and taking her cold hands impulsively, "don't take it so hard."

"I wish I were dead, dead," moaned Miss Batten. "It's all *awful,* you don't know how awful."

"I know in a kind of way," Cathy looked at her earnestly, "but there must be a brave way out. We are given a chance here to face consequences, and you have to be desperately brave."

"I'm terrified," the girl hid her face on Cathy's shoulder. "My people, for instance; they will disown me."

Cathy was looking over her head, through the window, The mystery of life was so tense, and there was not one gleam of divinity or beauty in the incident which had gone to the making of the trouble.

"He said that it would be all right," Miss Batten's words came stifled and smothered. "Everyone did it; all the smart people and the fashionable people, and that——" her voice was choked with sobbing.

Cathy thought of Robert Amyas, who, before he had married, "knew his way about." What were they all thinking of, she wondered, to accept such a ridiculously one-sided *dictum?*

"Don't think of the man," she said quickly; "forget him."

Miss Batten raised her head, and her face looked yellow and drawn.

"Yet he is responsible," she spoke with a kind of dull rage. "No one will do anything to him. I lose my whole life, and how I am to live at all I don't know. I'm not saying that I did not know it was wrong, I did know; but something came over me, and I lost myself, and now," she sobbed afresh, "I can't face anyone again. My people will disown me."

Her litany always ended on the same note, and Cathy wondered why it was that, just when they were so urgently needed, they should fail and turn away.

"Are you sure?" she asked. "Perhaps you are wrong.'

"Oh, no, I'm not," Miss Batten's voice was unhesitating; "they are very strict and self-respecting, and also very religious. I am dead to them, and I wish I were really dead!"

They were "strict, self-respecting and very religious," but they had no use for the miserable lost sheep, who was so absurdly like a sheep, as she sat and mopped her dim eyes. She was silly, sentimental and hungry for love, and she would have outworn all that, had it not been for Lady Margaret's kind thought, and come to an early middle-age, respected and liked by the pupils she had taught. There was not the least spice of the devil in the girl to brave her through, and her gods, who were reproductions of her parents, were also angry and hid their faces from her.

Cathy took her by the shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"It's my awful lack of principle," Miss Batten said, crying afresh. "When I went to Lady Margaret's dance I was perfectly happy——"

Cathy's voice was firm. "All that matters now is that you should pull yourself together. We know all about it, Aunt Amy and I, and you aren't alone with the misery any more."

There was no use talking to poor Miss Batten. All the sacredness had been pushed out of her life with one sweep, and she was broken. Even love was remote from her, and the story was likely to become a kind of joke. Lady Margaret was the most correct of hostesses, Miss Batten the most unlikely guest to cause confusion; but Bacchus had passed along, and, for an irredeemable second, Miss Batten put on the leopard skin and rushed after him. Shallow, weak, at the mercy of the man with the large nose, she had gone down to disaster.

As Cathy went out and on to Monica's house, she worked herself up into a feeling of rage. Muggins would help her to see more clearly, for incidents of the kind were the commonplace of her days. She would be able to help and assist, and her sympathies were always strongly on the side of the weak.

Monica was wearing her hat, and had set out a table for tea; and she looked unusually pretty. Her pale face was flushed and her eyes bright, and she greeted Cathy with an enthusiasm not wholly connected with her arrival. Cathy looked at the table and noted a box of cigarettes and a cake

"Is it a party?" she asked. "Oh, Mug, I wanted you to myself."

Monica smiled, and put her arm over her friend's shoulder.

"Not a party, no," she said in a gay voice; "only Jack Lorrimer. He's an old friend, and now he is back and out of the army."

"Well, I wish he'd stayed where he was," Cathy said petulantly, raising her beautiful eyebrows in a kind of protest. "You are thinking of him, and not of what I want to talk about."

"Can't I have even *one* man friend?" Monica said, with a playful pretence at reproach. "Really, Cathy, you are rather greedy. But what's up?"

Cathy took off her fur coat and adjusted her close velvet hat so that the wing was all on one side.

"It's Batkins," she said; "Batkins has gone a mucker."

"Miss Batten, your aunt's governess?"

"Exactly. She went to a dance, Mug, and some beast of a man got hold of her and——"

"Did the trick," said Monica shortly. "Poor girl. How old is she?"

"Twenty-seven. She was nursery gov. to Elizabeth and Constance. Took them for walks and taught them grammar."

"I suppose all you people are fearfully shocked," Monica remarked, with a twist of her mouth.

"Some of us," Cathy agreed. "Don't be too much outraged, Mug, we all know so little."

"And yet you'll dance with the man, and ask him to dine, and one of you will marry him." Monica's scorn intensified.

"I shall not," Cathy spoke with some heat.

"Not this special one, because you've had a chance to understand the workings of things, but others, Cathy, others. Why, there is your own friend, Sir Hector Foulkes; his record is as dirty as it well may be. What about poor little Esther Kynaston?"

Cathy looked at the fire.

"It's quite true," she admitted sadly. "I have danced with Hector often since, and he stays about everywhere. But I did go to see Esther, only she wouldn't have anything to do with me."

"And I don't blame her," Monica gave a quick sound of anger; "she has some pride."

"Can't you do something, and help me about Batkins?"

Monica went to her table and took up a paper.

"This is the place," she said. "I am one of the visiting doctors, and I'll look after her." She stood in the centre of the room and looked at Cathy. "I'll try and get some sense into her silly head. Oh, you all make me rabid. You won't face any facts. Miss Batten is a human being, and, if she was married to a tinker, you'd regard her child as a perfectly right and proper result. She was starving for sheer magnetism, and, worked up by the music and the surroundings, she hadn't an ounce of resistance in her."

Cathy moved uncomfortably. When Monica began to speak plainly she had a way of making her feel intensely uncomfortable. Nebulous things became close, clear and ugly, and the world revealed a visage which grimaced at her elbow.

"I want to help her," she said; "I can't think of whether it's good or bad."

"There you are," Monica made a gesture of despair.

Cathy shook her head. She knew that it would be a fine thing if one had the courage to face the whole of life, and that it was wiser to train the faculties as Monica had trained them, all ready for battle. She had disciplined strength at her disposal, and could go to war with the great allied powers of the world and the flesh.

"I can't bear to know ugly and cruel things, Muggins," she said, almost pleadingly, "and it's no use telling me."

"Well, it comes to this," Monica Henstock said, with a slight movement of her shoulders, "Miss Batten inherits the existing conventional justice meted out by the respectable. She bears the disgrace, the danger, the whole burden; and she is only one of many."

"Mug, dear, don't preach." Cathy got up and looked at herself in a small glass over the mantelpiece, "I don't believe in casting any one out; I simply couldn't do it."

There was a sound from the hall of an arrival, and Monica's face changed. She grew suddenly soft and gentle, and the fire died from her eyes. Cathy was not watching her. She turned when she heard a man's voice. "Oh, Mug, I'm *de trop;* I should not be here; but I'll only stay a very little time. I must see—what was his name?"

"Colonel Lorrimer," Monica replied, and her eyes were guarded.

You couldn't have told whether she wanted Cathy to stay or not, and probably she herself was not altogether sure.

"I know some Lorrimers," Cathy said, "Kentish people. I stayed with them once——"

"Not the same," Monica said, with a touch of sharpness. "Jack isn't anybody, any more than I am. We're both middle-class."

Muggins was always almost unaccountably touchy when Cathy asked who any one was.

"My Lorrimers aren't anything frightfully aristocratic," Cathy said, apologising at once. "I only wanted to know out of curiosity. I'm always interested in people."

CHAPTER IV

Cathy liked Jack Lorrimer at once. He was large and commanding, and though he was weather-beaten he did not look hard. He was a man of about forty, with a tendency to put on weight, which he combated skilfully, partly because he went to a good tailor, and partly because, of late, he had been leading an active life which had fined him down. His hair was short and smooth, his forehead narrow, and he had regular features, marred by a heaviness around the lower part of his face, and his clipped moustache did not hide the full, loose lines of his mouth.

His coming brought a fresh element into the room. Before he came they had been two women discussing life in secret feminine pastures where no man ever penetrates; Colonel Lorrimer drove away the rancours and antagonisms which had somehow begun to creep into the argument, and Monica greeted him with shining eyes. She was immensely proud of him as he stood there, returning her smile.

Cathy made ready to leave them, but she stood watching Lorrimer with her eternal and provoking interest. He could not be supposed to know that she looked at everyone like that, when he turned, as Monica made the introduction.

Cathy looked very vivid in the dull green of the room, with its sad, faded note, and her fur coat was a beautiful and expensive garment. The blue wing in her hat called out the colour of her eyes, and her face was slightly flushed. In her hands she held a bunch of violets, deep purple in colour, and she smiled at him with her quick, wonderful smile.

"You have often heard me talk of Cathy Rossiter," Monica said, "here she is, Jack."

Colonel Lorrimer advanced a little awkwardly. He had a trick of sticking out his elbows when he was impressed, or desired to be impressive, and he did so now.

He seemed to fill the room with himself and his conversation, but it was quite right that he should. He sat down as though Monica's room belonged to him. He was possessive; that was Jack Lorrimer's main attribute, and though the suggestion was tentative and remote, he flung a filmy strand in the direction of Cathy, like a stout and handsome spider, and prevented her departure.

"She mustn't go without tea," he said; "don't let her, Monica."

Monica looked at Cathy over the copper hot water kettle which was burning on the electric ring, and saw that Lorrimer had made exactly the impression she expected. She wanted Cathy to like him; she was one of her oldest friends, and "later on" it would be very nice if they got on happily together.

She had been interested in Jack Lorrimer, whose people lived in the semi-detached house next to her own home, since she wore a pigtail, and before she had been sent abroad to school; and she had fallen out of love with him because he felt that women would become "unsexed" if they had the privilege of making a cross on a voting paper. She had lost him completely in the winding ways of life, and found him again, rather unexpectedly, through a letter he had written to her during a long and dull time in Kut. Lorrimer had revived a number of old memories during that period, but none turned out so successfully as Monica. She was a good letter writer, of the exact kind, and she wrote him pages. She found out what he wanted and sent parcels to him, she also sent him papers and books, until Lorrimer began to count a great deal on her faithful and tireless ministrations.

For a whole year Monica had been gradually gathering herself around Jack Lorrimer, and, though she made no admissions, she had really decided to take the ultimate step and marry him as soon as he got home. He was leaving the army, and had done well, she believed. He had his D.S.O., and, though he was not in the eye of the public, he was entirely creditable. Furthermore, and Monica was not above taking such a fact into consideration, he was now a rich man, having inherited money from an uncle.

Monica had her profession, and had made her way, and, even though she knew that she longed almost wildly to feel his arms around her, she was not going to capitulate, nor were the walls to fall at the first blare of the trumpet.

As she made tea she felt glad that the moment had been postponed. She was agitated by the meeting, her hands shook, and it was well to have time to compose herself again. He sat and chattered at Cathy, his schoolboy suggestion accentuated and his solidity and neatness very marked indeed. The years since Monica and he had met had aged him, and put lines round his eyes, loosened the over-fullness of his mouth, and left him a happy materialist. He was telling Cathy a series of stories which they both enjoyed, and, every now and then, he included Monica in their talk.

Cathy saw him as Monica's man friend—the one rare bird whom Monica permitted to enter through her virgin door—and she felt the hardiness and vigour of his physical strength. He was far too large for the room, and his voice resounded in the small space; he kept his legs tucked away as best he could, because Monica tripped over them, and everything about him was warm and alive, except, perhaps, for his eyes, which were disappointing, for they were colourless and rather dull. There was something pebble-like about them, and they did not reflect his mood. Still, he was wonderfully joyful and almost triumphant. He had been to the War Office, and had told them there what he thought of them.

"My pension doesn't matter to me now," he explained. "It used to be the blot in the sun, but now I'm lucky enough to be independent. An old uncle of mine died, and left a whole pile of pennies to me."

Cathy was interested in Lorrimer's uncle, and asked a few questions, while Monica poured the boiling water into the tea-pot. She wondered what Lorrimer would say. If he told Cathy that his uncle had begun as a miner, she would at once think a great deal of the nephew, but Monica guessed that the Lorrimers were unlikely to advertise the fact.

Colonel Lorrimer leaned back, and, crossing his legs, he explained to Cathy that Walter Baggett had been a successful investor, a recluse, who never saw any one and who never allowed his relatives near him.

"The old man was always good to me," he said. "We were awfully poor, Miss Rossiter, and life was a tussle, as Monica probably remembers. I couldn't have taken my commission, or gone up for Sandhurst, only for him, though he wasn't very generous then. However, when he died, I got his savings. Do forgive me for talking like this," he added, "it can't be of the least interest to you." He turned quickly, and began to laugh at Monica, reminding her of an old habit of hers as a child, of saying that "her little finger" told her things.

"What is your little finger telling you now?" he asked.

"Mine tells me that I must go," Cathy said, getting up and putting her arm over Monica's shoulder.

"Won't you come and see me, Colonel Lorrimer? It's no use asking Muggins, she doesn't ever come, but perhaps you will."

"Is there anything more you want to ask me, dearest?" Monica said, holding Cathy's hand against her face. "About that business?"

"I have got the address," Cathy said, suddenly returning to the subject of her visit. "Batkins can go there any time?"

"Not 'any time,'" Monica said. "How like you, Cathy. The Home is crammed; but I'll ring you up and let you know when she can go. Meanwhile, be kind to the poor soul, and try to understand her."

Cathy's sensitive face flushed and her eyes looked hurt, but it was Lorrimer who spoke.

"I should have thought your advice quite unnecessary." Their eyes met, and Cathy gave him a glance of gratitude.

"I'm not an ogress, Mug, and I have told you how sorry I am," she said, half petulantly.

"I'm not talking about *you*." Monica got up, and, with her hand on Cathy's arm, walked to the door. "I was only thinking of your world, your aristocratic world, Cath, where rotters abound. Save her from them; don't let them turn her into a joke, and when they sneer at her——"

"They won't see her." Cathy was growing restive. "Aunt Amy is frightfully kind, and you may trust us to make it all easy. After all, Muggins, I hold no brief for the rotters, but we aren't fiends."

"You, again." Monica laughed and kissed her. "How easy it is to get a rise out of you, Cath." She gave a laugh. "When shall I see you again?"

"Soon," Cathy called back to her, and Lorrimer hurried forward to let her out through the demure little door which led into Monica's narrow hall.

He stood for some time on the steps watching her, and at last he turned inwards, and found that Monica had not moved from where she had been standing.

They sat down again, and now the party was as it should have been from the first; as it was when Monica had planned it, and before Cathy walked into the picture. Cathy had gone, but, in going, she had taken some at least of Jack Lorrimer's thoughts with her. Monica could see this very clearly. She gave him another cup of tea, and waited until he came back to the starting-point. Cathy had done what she invariably did, set the man thinking about her; for she had a way of stealing into people's hearts and surprising them into unexpected moods of romance.

"She is a dear, isn't she?" Monica remarked, cutting a slice of cake. "I always told you that there is no one like Cathy. Full of enthusiasm, and fearfully inconsistent, but a darling."

"Does it matter whether she is consistent or not?" he asked. "She's just herself."

"No one would wish her altered," Monica said emphatically, "only, like the rest of us, she is patchy, and sometimes disappointing."

Lorrimer put down his cup and looked at Monica. He had come there with the idea of asking her when she would marry him. He was forty-four, and it was time to settle down; he was not exactly an ambitious man, but he was beginning to feel that he was rich, and that he could become powerful in a small way. Buy a place in the country, keep hunters and become a J.P.; his ambitions were not tremendous. He looked again at Monica. Set beside Cathy, she was like a well contrived lamp compared to a star, and just then he was overcome by Cathy's clear shining.

"Cathy is wastefully abundant," Monica went on, smiling at Lorrimer. "You must be on guard against her lavishness."

"Do you mean that she is insincere?" he asked, a little stiffly.

"No more than sunrise or sunset can be insincere," she replied quickly; "but they can't go on all day. Cathy is by way of being crazy about social reform and public welfare. Don't take her seriously, Jack, she is just a beautiful joke."

Lorrimer appeared to be applying the term to his recollection of Cathy Rossiter, and whether he agreed or not he did not say. He wasn't at all sure that he understood women, but he knew that he thought Cathy very wonderful, and that he was not in any special hurry to unburden his heart to Monica. He was taking a flat in St. James's Court, and he wanted assistance about his wall papers. Monica's room was different to his mother's drawing-room, which, of course, he expected it to be. Monica was modern, and Lorrimer knew that he had not moved with the times. A man needed pulling together when he had been absent so long from England, and he felt out of it. She became immediately interested in his flat, and was unhesitating in her choice of colours for his rooms; she knew the people he should apply to for specially good electric light fittings, and she was helpful.

Gradually the sense of Cathy's presence receded, and Lorrimer became more easy and less reserved; he could even talk of Cathy again, and he asked Monica what they were "squabbling about" before he had come in.

It was the case of the governess, Miss Batten, Monica explained, turning on the lamp at her elbow, the light falling on her clever face. The people of Cathy's world inspired her with a sense of their utter futility, and they were up in arms over the moral guilt of Miss Batten, while they neglected the cleansing of their own Augean stables. Cathy believed she was doing her best, Lady Carstairs was also anxious to do her best, but the monstrous liberty allowed to those of their own house would continue unbroken.

Lorrimer listened judicially, and leaned his elbows on the arms of his chair, supporting his full chin on his folded hands. He was amused, and only that Monica appeared to be in rather deadly earnest, he would have laughed.

"It sounds a bit promiscuous," he said at last. "Are you sure this was the lady's first *faux pas?*"

The subject interested him, and he found a touch of the unusual in sitting there, discussing it with Monica; but nowadays you might talk of anything.

"My dear Jack, women are human animals," Monica said scornfully; "get that into your head, and make no mistakes. Nature cares nothing whatever for civilisation, or for marriage laws; it's a bit older than either."

"Still," Lorrimer laughed inwardly, though he kept the smile from his mouth, "it's rather a daring affair for a governess. What does Miss Rossiter think?"

"Cathy wants to help her—or wants me to help her—and she will be sweet and kind, and all the rest of it. She has got the traditional attitude, covered by sentiment."

"She spoke very kindly." Lorrimer took out his case, and asked Monica if he might smoke a cigar. "I am sure she will be kind."

"When is she anything else?" Monica said, almost irritably. "Cathy lacks what I call courage; she can't be anything but kind. Take the case of Hector Foulkes—or even the case of Lord Twyford, her own cousin, the man," she added with slight emphasis, "whom she will certainly end by marrying. Cathy never asserted herself. She told me that she was sorry for Twyford, because he was very wretched for a long time. He isn't wretched now."

"One has to keep up the standard," Lorrimer said, from behind a cloud of blue smoke. "Be reasonable, Monica. A governess has to be like Cæsar's wife, and if she isn't, well——" He shrugged his shoulders quite amiably. "As it is, people know what they are going to get, if they play the fool."

"And what have you to say about men?" she retorted. "Jack, it's no use pretending things with me; remember that I am in a position to know facts. Let the case be an equal one."

"Oh, men." Lorrimer's eyes were reflective. "It's not the same. I'm not speaking of myself," his eyelids flickered and he looked down at his hands, "perhaps I am a bit fastidious; but I know scores and scores of good fellows who aren't, and they're none the worse for it. Don't take it so seriously."

He suddenly felt outraged by Monica. What earthly right had she to talk as she did, and fling, as she was now doing, a string of statistics at his head, with regard to houses of ill-fame in Eastern ports. A veil should be drawn between such knowledge and the minds of decent women, and for any woman to attack a man upon such a subject was peculiarly unpleasing.

"Why!" Monica stopped tiptoe, as it were, on a staccato note, "I believe I have succeeded in shocking you, Jack."

She had, but he was not shocked by what she had told him, he knew all about that already; he was shocked to think that she should be cognisant of these things.

"I am rather old-fashioned," he said, rubbing his eyebrows and ruffling them, for they were thick and rather coarsely marked. "I don't like the idea of your knowing all these facts. Why should you? Any decent man keeps them out of sight of his women folk."

"Yes, you are old-fashioned," she agreed. "If Miss Batten had been educated a little about her own physiology, the disaster wouldn't have occurred."

She had forgotten that she intended to marry him, for the moment, for Monica was very much two people in one person, and the propagandist was up and out in her. In her oddly cold heat, she got up from behind the table and stood by the fire, the hem of her neat skirt touching his well polished brown shoes. She realised that Jack was excessively masculine, and was warring against her, even though he still smiled quite pleasantly. He breathed a little hard, and then he leaned forward and touched her wrist; only just touched it, as though to attract her attention, and the contact went through Monica like a stab of electric fire. She forgot what she had been going to say, and her eyes met his; it seemed as though she must slide into his arms, and that all their talk would fall into an ecstatic silence, but, even as she felt the rush of her suddenly surprised feeling overcome her, she realised that Lorrimer was rising to leave, and that he was totally unaware of any special emotion. He stood up, and pulled down his waistcoat, regarding the two clear creases in his trousers, and then he held out his hand, his elbows sticking out slightly, for he was shy at the moment. He was always self-conscious, both when he arrived in a room and when he got up to leave it, and his constraint was quite obvious.

"Then we'll go over the subject of the wall papers later," he said, and he looked down at her raised face. His hand felt a little hot, and he looked down at her and bit his lip; he was wondering if he would ask her then, and get it over. But she must give up all that bow-wow about sex questions, she really must, no county society would put up with it.

He was still holding Monica's hand, and, though she spoke of wall papers, her eyes were eager—terribly eager.

"Red for the dining-room," she said mechanically, "and white for the drawing-room. For the hall I should have buff——"

"I've brought back a lot of rubbish from the East," he said, and he drew her a little closer to him. "Nothing of any value, but gay things, phulkharis, and a heap of gold embroidery, as well as brass trays."

Monica's slender fingers were lying over his wrist, and, with a true sense of her profession, she became aware that Lorrimer's pulse was beating very rapidly. For one moment she tasted the joy of conquest and realisation, for she knew what he was going to say to her, and then the bell on her table rang fiercely and they started apart. Lorrimer had said nothing, and the interruption was maddening to Monica.

She walked to the table, hiding her irritation, and spoke sharply down the receiver.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Dr. Monica Henstock speaking. Oh, you, Cathy. What in the world do you want?"

Try as she would, she could not keep her anger out of her voice. Monica was not a successful woman in the affairs of love, and such as she are at the mercy of small incidents. A moment before, Lorrimer had been on the very edge of the spoken word, but Monica knew, only too well, that the intervention of this ridiculous call might mean postponement, and postponement mean that Lorrimer would never speak. She was the victim of unfulfilment, and this was not the first time.

As she listened to the reply, her face changed, and her eyes grew startled. She gave a few clear directions, and, hanging up the receiver, turned to Lorrimer. She was Dr. Monica Henstock to him now, and the other Monica had vanished.

"That girl we spoke of has been trying to kill herself," she said. "I must go at once, Jack. Luckily Cathy got to her in time, but it's serious."

"By God," Lorrimer said, his face serious and dismayed, "what a dreadful thing. I hope Miss Rossiter isn't fearfully upset."

"I'm more interested in Batkins," Monica said, taking up her hat.

"I'll see you as far as Cavendish Square. I've got a car, by the way, now that I'm a plutocrat, and I told the fellow to call here at six o'clock. He'll rattle us round in less than no time."

Lorrimer was very anxious to see Monica as far as her destination, and she sat beside him and felt more secure again. One had only to look at Lorrimer to be assured. He was like a mountain, the kind of mountain which would not be removed by any amount of prayer, neither would he travel to see Mahommed; the mountain, in fact, that remains just where you always expect it to be, which is the duty of all good mountains.

In the comfort of the padded car, Monica's nerves began to tingle again, and she gripped her neat bag, and pressed her fingers against the lock until it hurt her. Lorrimer had been very nearly in love with her a few seconds back, but he didn't feel at all so sure about it now. He did not like the idea of a wife who went off suddenly, with a bag in her hands, upon some indescribable errand. It was very admirable and good and fine, and he admired her. She allured him by her vestal clarity of profile, and her terrible knowledge of the byways of life, but, if he married her, she would have to relinquish her practice. He pulled on a chamois glove and studied the seams.

"I hope Miss Rossiter hasn't got the wind up badly," he said. "Give her my *salaams*, Monica."

"If I remember," Monica said absently.

She was beginning to worry about her case. From what Cathy said she would have to strip and fight for the unnecessary life of poor Batkins; the "mistake" was already doomed and done for.

He dropped her at the steps, and she was engulfed by the great doors which opened to let her in, and Lorrimer stood there for a little time before he turned away. But there was no sign of Cathy anywhere, and the only person he saw was a tall, dark young man, rather overdressed, who came out just as Monica went in, and looked at Lorrimer contemptuously, as though he hated him on sight. His look ruffled Lorrimer considerably, and he wondered if this was Twyford, the man Monica had spoken of in connection with Cathy. He felt like hurrying after him and kicking him, but he restrained himself, and then he walked down the steps to where the liveried chauffeur was eyeing him with a look of compassionate amusement. He seemed to feel that Colonel Lorrimer wasn't really anything or anyone, and he took his order from him without enthusiasm, when told to drive to the Army Club of which Lorrimer was a member. Lorrimer wished that he had known a duchess, for the pleasure of directing his chauffeur to her house—or even a celebrated actress—but he felt, quite suddenly, that he was a nobody, and that it was time he should make an effort to assert himself.

CHAPTER V

Colonel Lorrimer had postponed his visit to Monica Henstock for a considerable time. He was living at the Carlton, and the flat remained tenantless, awaiting his commands as to paper and paint.

He was settling down a little and felt less out of things; also, he had met Cathy Rossiter accidentally in Bond Street, and she had invited him to call at her aunt's house. His further impression of Cathy was even more vivid than the first, and she seemed to him like some royal princess who owned wide realms where everyone bowed before her. She had sailed into his vision, walking with her cousin, Lord Twyford, and, though Lorrimer was not impressed by Twyford, he felt that he had gained something intangible by being included in their company as they walked along together.

Cathy's wonderful untidiness was part of her charm. She was quite badly dressed, he supposed, but it did not matter. No one else could look like her. During the walk they had met one of the best known members of the Cabinet, who had teased Cathy about a hole in her glove, and spoken to Lorrimer, supposing him to be someone he had met before. All this pleased Lorrimer, but it was very little compared to the pleasure he had in realising that Cathy not only remembered their first meeting, but was quite obviously glad to think that they should improve their acquaintance. He wanted to buy her some flowers, but he felt that Twyford, who endured him with evident dislike, would have been affronted. It was not a good reason, but it prevented Lorrimer from acting on impulse. He was afraid of Cathy, in some subtle way. The whole meeting and parting had only been a matter of a few minutes, for Lorrimer had allowed Lord Twyford's gloomy silence to rout him. But the memory of it abode in his heart, and he felt that a marriage with Monica would be, at best, a dull affair.

Still, there was another side to his friendship with Monica; she was Cathy's friend, and he might count upon meeting her in the little house. He told himself that Monica was a sensible girl, and that she was one of the Amazons. Certainly, he had felt a conviction that she only waited for the words to be said to throw her own theories to the winds; but, then, he might have mistaken the indications. In his imagination he had regarded her as a possible wife, and set her, like a lay figure, on the throne of his hearth, and now he took her down again and stuck her away in a corner. Cathy was utterly out of his reach, but she had made Monica impossible at present. Once Cathy became Lady Twyford, and that particularly ungracious cousin of hers had actually a right to call her his own, Monica might be reinstated, but Lorrimer felt that he was falling in love, and that he must just allow things to take their course.

With mixed feelings, therefore, he set out one blowy afternoon to call upon Monica, and found her at home, nursing a cold. She was looking weary and tired and far too old for her age, and yet, when she saw him, she brightened up at once.

Lorrimer had brought her flowers, not the flowers he would have offered to Cathy, but good strong blossoms, which would keep fresh for a week if their stalks were attended to, and she received them from him with an exclamation of pleasure. She ordered tea at once, and had a great deal to say. Monica was very seriously annoyed about what she called "the Batten muddle." Miss Batten had been revived and brought back to health and strength under her ministrations, and then, as usual, the Philistines had conquered.

Lady Carstairs, whom Monica described as "a pious imbecile," had made arrangements for the ex-governess to learn weaving under the tuition of a certain Mrs. Beaumont. She was given just enough money to starve on, and was told that she could never again be trusted with the charge of pupils. The wretched girl accepted anything she was offered with a pitiable readiness, and had promised to learn to weave. What happened at the school where Miss Batten was taught her work Monica did not know, but, after a month, the girl vanished, and there was no trace of her anywhere.

"Well, I suppose it's no one's fault," Lorrimer said contentedly. It didn't seem to matter very much. The only interest he felt in the erring Miss Batten was, that she had once been living in Lady Carstairs' house. "She'll probably turn up later on."

Monica flushed suddenly, and stared at him.

"Jack, I won't believe that you are so selfish," she said emphatically; "I simply won't."

"But, my dear girl," he spoke persuasively, "what can *I* do? I can't go round with a bell and look for the missing lady. She is a responsible human being, and if she wants to disappear——"

"Don't you realise that she was persecuted?"

"No, I don't," he said flatly and with decision. "She got her chance and hadn't the wit to keep it. I should call it a very good thing if she chose to drown herself."

"You are very unjust," she said, and, to his surprise, her voice shook, and she seemed nearly tearful. "I took a special interest in the case, and these people messed it all up."

After that the rest of his visit had been unaccountably jerky and had lacked the smoothness of the earlier hour. Monica recovered herself, and the sense of awkwardness lessened, but very soon Lorrimer got up and said "Goodbye."

He had nothing very special to do that evening, and he was a man with few friends. A cheerful, agreeable acquaintance he remained, and friendships of the deeper order did not come in his way. Beneath his surface heartiness he was lonely, and also intensely critical, constantly finding that people offended and slighted him, and he was acutely sensitive. Now that he was really a rich man, he thought things ought to have changed for him, and, so far, they had not. He dined alone very often, unless he picked up a man at the Club and stood him a dinner, but he had no engagements. When he left Monica's house he had no objective, and he walked slowly towards Piccadilly.

To be a really rich man, and at the same time to be so absurdly devoid of entertainment, was, as Lorrimer told himself, "damned stoopid." Why did not someone appear and bring with him an object in life? He thought of her again. Monica was a dear, and most undeniably clever and attractive, but she was very professional. He might have asked her out to dine with him, in spite of her cold, for she would have come had he done so, and he wondered whether it was worth while ringing her up.

By the time he had reached Piccadilly he decided against this. London was utterly wearisome to him, and he wondered why he had ever taken the still unfurnished flat. Again he thought of Cathy and the Cabinet Minister who had found a hole in her glove. Lorrimer wished that he could forget her for a little. These piercing memories of her face, seen only twice, were painful to him. It was useless to love her; he might as well love a star in the night sky, and yet, as he dressed for dinner, he kept on thinking of her and wondering when he could go and call. If he called, and she was out, it would be like paying his last shilling for a chance which might not be repeated, and he wondered if he could induce Monica to get her to come to a little dinner or a theatre. Cathy was devoted to Monica, and perhaps, if Monica were not jealous, it could be done. He tied his tie badly, and sat pulling at it. One thing he would not do, and that was, make a cat's paw of Monica. He liked the girl far too honestly for such a cad's game. With a sigh he relinquished the project, and he looked at himself in the long mirror. He was a fine-looking man, with a good effect of leadership, unless he became nervous. He liked to give lavishly, now that he had money to give, and the only trouble was that his world was impossibly and ridiculously small.

When he got down to the hall he decided that he would dine out, and that it would be interesting to push his way beyond the more select circle of restaurants and find something to beguile his mind with in the Soho region. Sometimes he wished that he knew a little of the Continent, and could go over to Paris, certain of enjoyment; but his French, what there was of it, was deplorably bad. Besides, he disliked foreigners.

Taking his time, since there was no need to hurry, he wandered vaguely along a side street, where, outside one door, there hung a huge lantern with the name "Voyons" inscribed upon it. It looked rather a second-rate, one-horse show, he thought, but it was probably as good as any of the neighbouring places, and he decided to go in. The sound of music attracted him, for he was intensely fond of popular airs. He could disparage the people, the food, and the whole place, and he felt it might do him good. Lorrimer was not out for adventure but for distraction, and he knew well how to deal with the advances of women who might become troublesome. He had gained his experience of the type, and he had no intention of letting himself in for anything.

The "Voyons" Restaurant was a cheap place, and a few musicians with weary faces were fiddling at the far end. Solitary men and women, or groups of both, sat at the small tables, and the waiters fled about with fearful zeal. The air was thick with smoke, and Lorrimer came in and looked around him with no approval in his face. He gave his order sternly and with immediate effect, and was abrupt and rude to the man who waited upon him. In all the collection he was the only really impressive person there.

At the next table to him a man with a yellow face and black hair was reading a French paper and drinking coffee, and opposite, a woman with bobbed hair and a long hose was evidently waiting to pounce. Let her wait; Lorrimer was not going to interest himself in her.

He ordered his meal with his touch of stiff reserve, and sat drumming his fingers on the cloth. They were a rag-bag collection, these neighbours of his, and he scorned them all. Yet they gave him relief from the sense of being out of it; and they were all interested in him.

Lorrimer was a good judge of wine, and the wine at the "Voyons" was by no means of a bad quality. He was also, in a surface way, a judge of people. Nearly everyone in the restaurant was cheap, struggling, and aiming at the joyous life of the rich, and, alone of them all, he really belonged to the solid land of large banking accounts and security. After a time he became aware of the existence of a small, quiet-looking girl, of anything between twenty-five and thirty. She had dabbed a wretched patch of rouge on her cheeks, and wore a velvet cap which did not suit her; she looked as much out of it as anyone well could be. He could see her well from where he sat, and considered her carefully. She had large, eager eyes and a wavering mouth, and, in spite of her flimsy dress and thin stockings, she bore the stamp of respectability. Every now and then she looked around her and smiled, and a very tragic smile it was, Lorrimer thought. He did not like to study her too intently, in case she might get up and try to join him at his table, but she looked as though she wanted a meal, and she was drinking coffee, like his neighbour, and making no pretence to eat. Once he caught her eye, and she made a little quavering movement as though she wished him to show some further sign, but, withered by his indifference, she relapsed again into her nervous habit of glancing from face to face.

The man who had been reading the French journal got up and went out, leaving his paper behind him, and Lorrimer, who had arrived at dessert, picked it from the floor and began to study it, recognising words he knew here and there. He wondered if it would entail a lot of bother if he were to offer the queer, bird-like little creature a liqueur. If she could be got rid of at once, he rather favoured the idea. In any case, she would be someone to talk to. The woman with the bobbed hair and the long nose was detestable, but this other adventuress was quite of a different type. He laid down the paper and looked across at her again, and he saw that she was drying her eyes with a crumpled handkerchief.

Lorrimer hated to see a woman cry. It was one of his most deeply rooted feelings, and he was immediately sorry. He had once been poor and had gone through bad times, and he was there with a pocket stuffed to bursting with notes. One of those might console her. She was to him as an unhappy crossing-sweeper, and he decided to do a magnanimous act.

Getting up slowly, and without any sign of his purpose, he crossed the floor, and, standing at the little table, he touched the girl's arm.

"Come over to my table," he said, "and have a liqueur! What is the matter, and why are you crying?"

The girl started violently, and gave her queer, frightened smile, but she made no answer, she only obeyed him very humbly.

Having ordered her a maraschino, Lorrimer began to talk to her, his hands folded on the table in front of him.

"Now, look here," he said, "you are playing the fool. I don't know who you are, but this sort of thing isn't your trade."

Her tears fell unrestrainedly, and she nodded her head, whether accepting or denying his judgments he could not tell.

"If you have any people, go back to them," he said, "and don't be stoopid. Try anything else that turns up, but, don't you see, my good girl, you're simply asking for trouble."

"Thank you, thank you," she said in a stifled voice, but the voice was educated and pleasant.

"If you've got into any kind of hole, and I can help you, I'll do it," he went on, and a really joyful sense of his own power flowed over his spirit. There was something worth while in this adventure of his, and he was getting great value out of it.

"Tell me something about yourself," he went on, "and

I'll help you, as I said. You can trust me; I am always most awfully sorry for anyone who is down."

Very slowly, and with great difficulty, she began to tell her story, but her mind rambled from point to point and it all took a long time.

"You are the first person who has been kind to me since I saw Miss Rossiter," she said, breaking off in her lamentable history, and Lorrimer stared at her, flushed, gulped a mouthful of coffee, and was hard put to it not to express his feelings. It was like a miracle, it was a revelation, it was enough to make an atheist believe in God. Cathy was in a state of great trouble of mind about Miss Batten, as he already knew, and here, by the mercy of Providence, he had found her, found her in an obscure restaurant, and had done the right thing. The rewards of virtue were usually remote and took time to pay, but his reward had come with the swiftness of a flash. All the evening he had been thinking of Cathy, and wondering how he might make his way into a closer proximity to her life, and now the means had been provided.

He sat back in his chair and looked down, betraying nothing by his eyes. Up to that moment he had thought that a couple of pound notes would be a handsome donation, sufficient to clear his conscience and to make the shadowy woman happy, but now he immediately began to think out a far-reaching scheme. He hardly listened to Miss Batten's account of herself as a would-be weaver, nor to the advice she received from a fellow-worker to cut the concern and make her living by a night-hawk existence, which she depicted in alluring colours. Lorrimer was wondering what would really be the best line to take. His heart was hot within him and he pondered carefully.

First of all, Miss Batten must be returned to Cathy, like a lost book out of a lending library. Her career as a night-hawk had been totally unsuccessful, and she was penniless. She must be taken to a quiet lodging, and he decided that his own share in the story must come to Cathy through the agency of Miss Batten. She was educated, and possibly, with a little training, could undertake a secretaryship. Anyhow, he would, as he expressed it, "put up the bullion" and undertake the entire responsibility for her training and keep. His having done the right thing exempted him from all suspicion, and once he had preserved Miss Batten from further falls in the mire, he would only be called upon to write cheques.

Meanwhile Miss Batten watched him with adoring eyes. She had fallen upon evil, evil days since the occasion of the dance, and here was a total stranger who really came up to the standard which she had read of in books, but never encountered in the crude realities of life. She had been laughed at cruelly by one or two men who had seemed inclined to take her at her own valuation, and had been robbed of ten shillings by a possible client, who had invited her to supper, and then disappeared, leaving her a shivering mass of misery.

The whole world was ugly, cruel and heartless, and her heart was like ice when she sought the warmth of the "Voyons" Restaurant with enough money to pay for a cup of coffee. As Cathy had said, she never really changed, and Miss Batten was still the sensitive, easily crushable governess she had always been. When Lorrimer came towards her, she supposed that he was about to make the wretched suggestion that she feared, while she sought it, and his first few words did nothing to reassure her. Only gradually the light dawned in upon her trembling soul, and she found herself pouring forth her whole heart to him as he listened, with his eyes on his plate.

"You've been a hopeless little idiot," he said, quite kindly. "But I think you have about had your lesson. It's time you turned over a new leaf."

"But how can I?"

She began to cry afresh, and her handkerchief having become reduced to a state of sponge-like limpness, Lorrimer solemnly handed her his own, which was of fine white silk.

"I intend to see you through," he remarked, "only you will have to promise me that you won't play the fool any more."

Miss Batten was ready to promise anything in or out of reason. She would have gone down on her knees and kissed his boots if he would only have permitted it.

With a terse brevity Lorrimer outlined his plan. He knew of rooms in Bayswater, kept by a respectable woman. On his recommendation she would be taken in there.

"Tell her that your late landlady got drunk, and that the place was impossible," he said, and Miss Batten committed the suggestion to her memory.

"You must wash your face before we leave here and try to look a little less dishevelled."

He got up as he spoke and took down his coat, and Miss Batten flickered away to repair the ravages of her tears. Lorrimer sat down again and smiled. He had never yet felt so satisfied with himself, and he tipped the waiter and paid his bill with the air of a man who is well content.

As they drove together in a taxi towards Powis Street, he spoke very seriously to his companion. The next day, he told her, she must communicate with Miss Rossiter, who had been very anxious indeed about her.

"Do you know Miss Rossiter?" she asked breathlessly.

"Very slightly, but I know Doctor Henstock, and she, too, is worried."

"Oh, Doctor Henstock," Miss Batten's eagerness died away a little, and she added at once, "Of course she is very kind."

"I will arrange for you to stay with Mrs. Hack," Lorrimer said in his strong, masterful way, "and, later on, if there is anything more to be done, you can count upon me to do it."

There was a long and almost passionate silence upon the part of Miss Batten, and then her small voice crept out into speech.

"Why are you so kind to me?" she asked. "It is wonderful."

"I'm always sorry for the under dog," he remarked. "Besides," he struggled to be honest, "I don't do things that I don't want to do."

Motives are strange things, and Miss Batten, had she been told Lorrimer's motive, would not have believed it. He had, it is true, taken no special glory to himself, and had become frosty and almost affronted by her enthusiasm in the taxi; he had repeatedly told her that he was doing nothing that was either great or wonderful and had asked her, finally, to stop speaking of it. But there it was. Perhaps if we arrive at doing as much for another, the motive may be overlooked in the higher spheres.

For a long while after his return he sat in a deep seat in the lounge at his hotel, and his eyes were on the future. Cathy and he would have to discuss Miss Batten's fate, and he might count upon a number of meetings on the head of it; all perfectly natural and legitimate. None of the other men she knew would have the same claim to her approval. Would Lord Twyford have acted as Knight Errant? Not he, if Lorrimer was any judge of physiognomy. Twyford was hard and self-centred, and he specialised in a bad manner. Lorrimer called him a "Blighter," and passed on to the memory of the dark, fashionable young man whom he had once seen coming down the steps of Lady Carstairs' house. He suspected that here was another foe. You had only to look at that fellow to know that he was a rotter, and he hated him on sight. The man's look had been offensive, and his air of assurance, a challenge. If he had met a rouged-up governess, his attitude towards her would be a foregone conclusion.

At last Lorrimer went to bed, and he slept the deep sleep of a man whose conscience is quiet, and whose life is an open tribute to the beauty of doing the right thing.

CHAPTER VI

The social world to which Robert and Lilian Amyas belonged was ringing with the divorce case, and Lilian was receiving the criticism which follows upon publicity. She was condemned or excused according to the minds of those who talked about it, but Robert was an object of universal pity.

He had been very angry with Lilian, and now the world was crying out against her, and he wished that the world would cease to cry. Robert had demanded revenge, but discovered it to be a two-edged sword, and there was something in his half-cynical, half-dreamer's nature which made revenge appear oddly cruel. His sense of anger against his wife died quite suddenly, and he could only wonder at his lost enthusiasms of rage.

He was dining at Lady Carstairs' house a week after the reappearance of Miss Batten, and the drawing-room was crowded with guests. Cathy was wearing a shimmering green dress, trimmed with gold and fur, and she looked wonderfully lovely. She was happy, and her gaiety was infectious; even Twyford seemed to be lighted by her radiance, and Robert noticed a new figure in the gathering. He thought he had seen the man before, but could not recollect where, and he disliked him quite definitely. The new-comer was Colonel Lorrimer, and Cathy appeared to regard him with a kind of special interest.

There were many large mirrors in Lady Carstairs' drawing-room, and Lorrimer was reflected in them all at once, so Amyas thought; as if there was not more than enough of him there already. Cathy could be really very irritating at times with her enthusiasms, and she showed a lack of selective power. From the corner where he sat, looking intensely bored, he regarded Lorrimer with careful scrutiny.

The man was a materialist, with signs of it everywhere, and yet he was imposing himself upon Cathy. Robert decided that Lorrimer had no special personality, but he was intensely solid, and women seemed now and then to evince a passion for solidity. Cathy, he thought, was making far too much of him. The idiot was in love with her, and surely she was above the smallness of wishing for conquest. He decided to tackle her about it when opportunity arose, and he made his way to Lady Carstairs, who treated him, on account of the divorce case, as though he were ill and should be humoured. When dinner was announced, he found that his place at the long table was next to Cathy, who had been taken in by Colonel Lorrimer. Amyas was without any lady, as his invitation had been an after-thought, given that morning when he met Lady Carstairs while she was shopping, and he had accepted it rather abstractedly.

"When are you going to talk to me?" he asked her, in a piqued voice, for Cathy had been absorbed by Lorrimer.

"Oh, Robert, I *was* talking to you," she said, "or at least at you; you could have listened to what I said."

Amyas raised his eyebrows and made no other reply. He felt unaccountably vexed by her, and, after all, he was an old friend. Cathy was faithful, but she had too many new friends, they jostled the others, and no one likes to be jostled.

"You are taking yourself seriously," he said, because he wanted her not to return to Lorrimer, who had, as far as he could gather, been telling her that he wished to go and live in the country. Why didn't he, then? He would be better there than here.

"Why should Miss Rossiter not do so?" Lorrimer asked, and Robert regarded him with a smile.

"Because it spoils her," he said in his delicate, critical way. "Once people begin to take themselves seriously they do no good in the world."

Lorrimer said nothing, but this profile suggested that he felt it to be just the idiotic answer he would have expected from Amyas.

"Also," Robert continued, "it makes them impersonal. A huge mistake. Further, it leads them into the public Press, if not the Law Courts, because that is the short cut to notoriety."

He addressed Lorrimer deliberately. "You, I take it, are a perfect monster of common sense?"

Lorrimer flushed; he was extremely angry, but he only laughed.

"I expect so," he replied.

"And you are absolutely wrong," Cathy turned her laughing eyes to Amyas. "Of all the wildest philanthropists alive Colonel Lorrimer is the greatest. If I were to tell you——" she turned, and laid a finger on Lorrimer's arm. "No, I won't give you away, but if I were to tell you just one little bit of his secret mystery, Robert, you would be literally crushed to the earth with remorse."

"Then he will end badly," Amyas said more pleasantly. "The only way in which one can hope to deal with life is through a process of complete egotism. Forgive me, Colonel Lorrimer, if I misjudged you."

"We want to make a new world," Cathy continued, "one in which there is no pomp and circumstance."

Amyas looked along the table, and watched Lady Carstairs, who was talking to a Bishop.

"A two-hours day world," he said, laughing at her. "Shall we ask the Bishop if he really believes that riches are the root of all evil?"

Cathy turned again to Lorrimer.

"Robert might listen to you. He's tired of all my arguments."

"When I was out to-day," she went on, "I saw a crowd of people all pushing and struggling for a place, just to watch a Royal carriage go by. They all fought and struggled to watch some very ordinary people who are no different to anyone else. Why can't they see," she went on emphatically, "that there is no real glory in these things? The same people crowd in the same way to look at a popular criminal, only more of them go in that case. I hate a servile world, and it could not be if only people would think for themselves."

"And of course you agree with Miss Rossiter?" Amyas suggested, with a hidden touch of malice, as he spoke to Lorrimer. "I warn you that she will ask you to remove all the really exciting events from the day."

"I agree entirely with Miss Rossiter," Lorrimer said defiantly. If this ass thought that he was a snob he was going to show him that he was mistaken. He felt his own origin stir in his blood, and he turned to Cathy with sudden gentleness.

She did not care a rap for social distinction, and he had been afraid that she might consider him in some way beneath her. A sense of assurance came to him.

"I am a nobody," he said, and again he met her raised eyes, "so I speak as an outsider. I began life with nothing, and all I have I owe to a working man."

"You start with an advantage," Amyas said drily. "Miss Rossiter makes a cock-shy of the Peerage in general, and crowned heads in particular. She is merely amusing herself by abusing her own relations, a fault which is quite human. Yet, if she was prepared to leave you a few illusions, you might not be any the worse off because you believed a class, to which you don't belong, to be better than it is."

He had not meant to say what he had, and he met Cathy's look of reproach, as she got up to follow the line of white shoulders and beautiful dresses out of the large room. He had annoyed and hurt her, and, worse still, he had played into Lorrimer's hand. Lorrimer had scored, and was looking as though he knew it. He was even quite dignified, for, though he knew none of the other men present, and was in a slightly awkward situation, he sat there reposefully and appeared not to mind. But Lorrimer had done it too dexterously. He loomed there as a positive danger, and, with Cathy's awful capacity for impulse, who could foretell what would be the next stage of the affair? Amyas decided that he would not talk to Lorrimer, but that he would watch him carefully.

At the end of the table, Stockton, an elderly Member of Parliament, was talking shop to Twyford, and Twyford was, as usual, quite uninterested. Stockton was a big man, in his way, and powerful; he owned three newspapers and moulded the political views of thousands of men and women he had never seen. Twyford, with his stubborn lack of imagination, was not concerned with the unknown masses, and Stockton was obviously nettled by the lack of enthusiasm he evinced. Stockton had new schemes for every week in the year, and he knew the value of ardour; his large face wore an expression of disgust, and he turned from Twyford. The proprietor of three newspapers felt that it was time that the Twyfords of this world were swept away. In his momentary anger his eye fell upon Lorrimer, who sat there like a large island in an empty sea, and something in his attitude struck Stockton at once. He looked as though he might be thinking, and might quite possibly be thinking sensibly. Lorrimer had the cut of a sensible man and it appealed directly to Stockton, who moved in his chair and spoke to him.

Again Amyas watched Lorrimer, and tried to think that he gave him an unprejudiced attention. There might be more in him than he fancied—more, in fact, than mere bulk, but bulk was often an asset.

Lorrimer by no means jumped at the remark thrown towards him. He appeared to permit it to come well within range before he responded, and then he replied with a platitude.

Stockton was interested. He had drawn Lord Twyford a dead blank and he had no further use for him, and now he was fully prepared to turn his attention to Lorrimer.

Robert turned to talk to the man on his right, and decided that there was a fatality in events which could not be avoided. His head was aching; he wanted to take some of the white tablets in his small bottle.

Meanwhile there was Cathy, who might have been kinder to him. He felt that he needed a great deal from Cathy, and she was occupied with Lorrimer. Cathy was always occupied with someone, and it made her difficult to get at.

Before they left the table, Robert heard Stockton giving an invitation to Lorrimer to dine with him at the House, and it was obvious that he intended to improve their acquaintance.

When they went into the drawing-room, Amyas had made up his mind to corner Cathy, but so had Twyford, and so, also had Lorrimer, and she sat smiling up at them all.

"Which of you am I to talk to?" she asked. "I think it must be you, Robert, you look aspirinish and cross."

Lorrimer retired at once; he seemed quite assured and not in the least disturbed by her decision, and Twyford stood to argue the point.

"I hardly ever see you," he said, "it is ridiculous, Cathy. I had that wretched woman, Lady Duntlair, giggling at me all through dinner. She looked as if she had drunk too much."

"Well," Cathy retorted, "if you were a nobody you might have escaped her. It pleases me when you have to suffer for your advantages. Go away and grumble to someone else. I'm riding with you to-morrow morning, and then you can be as grumpy as you please."

"To-morrow I mayn't want to be grumpy," he said, staring at her.

"You must renounce Cathy and all her works, for the present," Amyas interposed. "I want to find out something which she only can tell me."

Twyford took no notice of Robert. He had always liked Lilian; now he felt himself to be in arms for her sake. He was intensely direct in his theories, and was scrupulous where friendships were concerned. As for Lorrimer, he hardly thought of him at all; Amyas was more clearly in the light; Amyas who had muddled the Lilian business, and who was now free to attempt to entrap Cathy through her ridiculous sympathy. To Twyford, the fact appeared clear, and he went away to lean against the wall and yawn openly, promising himself that the next morning he would tell Cathy what she was in for. You could trust Cathy to stand firm upon a scruple; and to let Robert immediately show that he loved her, before the divorce was a week old, was literally indecent. There was a fine constancy in Twyford, and he stuck to whatever he put his hand to, for he had a latent sense of rigorous fidelity. Cathy must be got out of this over-heated atmosphere and taken to the country. She must stop this craze for talking of the conditions of the poor and the existence of social evils; if she had a nursery it would cure her and give her an object upon which to spend herself lavishly. Though he was not a psychologist, he felt quite sure that Cathy would never give any man the central place in her life. She would reserve that for a son.

Cathy turned to Robert, and her face was penitent.

"I have hurt Twyford," she said regretfully. "I hope you are worth it."

"Can he be hurt?" Amyas glanced across the room and gave his cold laugh. "If you took a hatchet, perhaps; he isn't exactly a sensitive plant. And that leads me on to your other friend. What awful virtue has he displayed? I find him the reverse of attractive."

"Colonel Lorrimer?" Cathy grew earnest. "I must tell you, though I suppose it is not really fair. It was *he* who found Batkins."

Amyas looked up at the ornate ceiling, which was a mass of gold, blue and brown, and distressed him.

"Where?" he asked drily.

"In a restaurant in Soho."

"Does he usually go about Soho with a landing-net, saving pretty ladies in thin silk stockings and fur coats?"

Cathy became eager. She had a great deal to say about Lorrimer, and she told the story well. That Amyas was mean and sceptical did not affect her at all. Lorrimer had acted unconsciously, and had shown what manner of man he was. He had been kind and simple throughout.

"You should hear Batkins talk of him," Cathy went on; "she can't say too much."

"I don't want to hear her," Robert's voice was weary and fretful; "I don't like all these saintly people. It isn't natural. If we go on at this rate, Cathy, the world will be no place for the likes of me. I become nauseated. Besides," he looked at her sideways, "I don't swallow it all. I don't believe that very massive people are ever saints; it's against the æsthetic tradition. Were he thin," he continued reflectively, "I might be persuaded, but he is too large. Look at him now."

Cathy turned, and let her gaze travel down the room to where Lorrimer was sitting talking to her cousin Otho. They were slightly apart from a larger group, and Otho was telling a story which amused Lorrimer. He was laughing rather too loudly, and he was not looking his best at the moment.

"Nothing you have told me convinces me," Amyas remarked, and he was pleased to see that Cathy shrank quite suddenly from her former attitude of admiration. She watched Lorrimer with a look almost approaching to fear on her face, and then she seemed angry, but her momentary irritation passed by like a summer cloud.

"You are rather like a black-beetle, yourself," she said, "shiny, reserved and empty, Robert. A very smartly turned out black-beetle who is in the right set, and yet you can't imagine anyone finding any kind of fault with you."

"I want you to be careful," he said, speaking in a different voice. "Cathy, I expect my nerves are in a bad way. I have been trying a whole variety of dopes because I couldn't sleep, and it isn't good for the nerves, but I want you not to play around with Lorrimer. He doesn't belong to us, and he isn't of our kind."

"Don't be arrogant; that argument is the last I shall listen to," Cathy said rapidly.

"He may be a divine coalheaver," Amyas went on, not heeding her, "but I don't like him. He is going to be a success. No one wanted him when he came, and he has made at least two friends to-night. He'll do Otho well enough to make pretty certain of him. Stockton, who is always on the look-out for a new man, preferably with money, has also made a note of your friend."

"What a lot you have to say," Cathy laughed. "And *why* all this advice?"

"Oh, can't you see that he is in love with you?" Amyas spoke with a queer touch of passion. "He ought not to be allowed to speak to you."

"It is extraordinary how unfair you allow yourself to be," she said quietly.

"Twyford, or any of the others, would never try and take a mean advantage of you, Cathy," Amyas continued, "but this fellow will. If he can haul you in somehow, I feel he will do it. I believe he knew all the time who Miss Batten really was, and it was an investment. He bought her good-will, and he knew what it would be worth to him." He paused for a second. "I'm sorry, I really am, because I'm being so spiteful, and I loathe seriousness of speech; it's all because of that man whom I don't believe in."

Cathy got up and vanished from him, withdrawing herself deliberately. She had had enough of Robert in this mood. He sat where she had left him, his shoulders drooping and his eyes turned ironically towards Lorrimer, who was still exhibiting a boisterous hilarity in the company of cousin Otho. Her own mind hovered around Lorrimer, and she realised quite clearly that he flourished almost grossly under the encouragement of success. Such was the external judgment, but she recalled Miss Batten's testimony. Batkins had described him as the acme of delicacy and consideration. His simplicity, his blunt kindliness, his tact . . . and all this surprised in him in a secret hour, far from witnesses. As she sat down and began to talk to Lady Margaret, she reproved herself harshly. Robert had influenced her for a moment, and she resented the idea.

Lady Margaret was petulant and feeling ill. She asked, rather pointedly, who "that large, noisy man" was, and again Cathy became Lorrimer's trumpeter, but, before she had explained him, Lady Margaret was obviously bored. She felt, very strongly, that there was every need for a class blockade, and under the stress of strikes, taxes, and a possible incursion of servants who desired to be addressed as "Miss," and alluded to as "the young lady," that a line must be drawn taut and strong. Quite clearly she relegated Lorrimer to the outside ring, and was fussed, and slightly irritable, since he was there at all. Her kindness was waning as the conditions of life became more troublesome, and, though she was prepared to patronise to almost any extent, she grew actively hostile when the masses began to talk of "rights."

"I don't mind having to call a servant 'Miss' if it pleases her," Cathy said. "It's a very easy concession to make. The only reliable standard of so-called gentility is character."

"Don't talk wild nonsense, Cathy," Lady Margaret replied. She saw, with visible stiffening of her back, that Lorrimer was proposing to join them, and she gave him an icy nod, merely admitting his existence, when Cathy introduced him formally. He became awkward at once and looked as though he wished to propitiate Lady Margaret.

"I think you often talk in a way which is likely to do harm," Lady Margaret went on, ignoring Lorrimer. "In fact, I can't think what we are all coming to."

She had never really recovered from the Miss Batten episode, and it had soured her.

"It is not a bad time," Lorrimer remarked; he was feeling more secure again, for Cathy had bathed him in a golden glance, full of encouragement.

"We are asleep," Cathy went on with growing enthusiasm. "I detest our dull mental sloth, our fatuous ignorance. Where has our imagination gone to, Colonel Lorrimer?"

"What do you mean, Cathy?" Lady Margaret frowned and twitched her eyebrows. "Who is lacking in what? By sloth, I suppose you mean laziness. Servants are all hopelessly lazy."

Lorrimer glanced from Lady Margaret's eyebrows to Cathy's lighted face, and he spoke at once. He had a good strong voice, and he said something about "doing the right thing" and "playing the game"; he said that he was an optimist, and that, in due time, the world would return to sanity.

Lady Margaret looked at him with her peering eyes, and nodded once or twice. Lorrimer was better than she had suspected, and he seemed to be right-minded, though she still disapproved of his outward lack of breeding.

They were disturbed in the end by Twyford, who acted like a stopper, and put an end to the conference which was already becoming hopelessly involved.

Twyford, by right of relationship, remained on after the others had left, and Lady Carstairs withdrew discreetly. She wanted Cathy to marry Twyford and get it done. They had been "as good as engaged" for years, but she preferred a regularised footing. She had watched Cathy and Robert Amyas with a slight touch of uneasiness. Of course, Robert Amyas was "the innocent party," even though innocence was a word hardly calculated to suggest his personality; but he had not been a success as a husband. Cathy, with her awful tendency towards sympathy, was quite capable of making the man think she cared—and then, she never really did care. How many of these tragedies the recording angel had already registered in Cathy's dossier! Twyford was deplorably slow. He took ages in doing anything, and, worse still, he took far too much for granted. Was he going to stand there staring widely at Cathy, until at length some whim caught her into the wrong sort of marriage? Lady Carstairs melted away, saying to herself that "two was company." Getting Twyford up to the point of action was like moving the whole House of Lords single-handed, but she hoped sincerely that to-night would settle it.

He came to where Cathy was standing, her face a little pale and her eyes tired. The evening had reduced her in an indefinable way, and she was less happy, less gay than usual. Still she smiled as he spoke to her.

"Cathy," he said, in his quiet, bored way, "I wonder when you intend to let me have a chance to ask you to marry me?"

"Oh, don't ask me," her voice implored him. "Can't we be friends? I don't want to be married."

"Not yet, but some time. Besides," he coloured a little, "I love you, Cathy."

She shook her head.

"You loved Nora," she said half sadly. "I know you did."

Twyford looked at the floor and considered her words.

"I did," he agreed, "but—well, you know the story, and it's ended long ago. Can't you believe that I love you?"

He came to her, and stood patiently watching her face.

"I want your friendship," she said, and then, without any warning, she sat down and covered her face with her hands.

Twyford bent over her, troubled and distressed. She seemed to him to be talking fierce, miserable nonsense, and to be consumed with her longing to do something with her life which would be of use—of use—of use. He had always regarded her talk as something which really meant very little, and now it appeared that it meant everything to Cathy Rossiter. She was telling him that she had lived far from perils and hardships, and that it was all arranged thus for her at the price of suffering.

"You'll end by getting into trouble," he said, forgetting himself in his sudden anxiety for her. "Cathy, all this talk of yours is eyewash, and yet I believe you mean it seriously."

It seemed to Twyford as though Cathy was looking at something which he could not see. "When things are strong enough to be true," she said, "they have to be."

CHAPTER VII

THE evolution of Miss Batten continued steadily, and she was rapidly becoming a capable secretary. She had grown less indistinct in the process, and had a look of maturity she had formerly lacked. In fact, Batkins was developing into a real person, so far as in her lay. She had work which she was doing creditably, she had begun to earn a living wage, and she had an idol; so it may be said that her gods were kind. She saw very little of Lorrimer, but when she did see him he was genial and threw her little words of kindness, as a dog-lover throws bits of cake to a good dog. She wanted to save his life at the risk of her own, to perform some dramatic act of devotion.

Next to Colonel Lorrimer, Miss Batten's love was given to Cathy Rossiter, and Cathy's interest in her was a help and a joy, like some wonderful luxury, to be indulged in now and then. Sometimes, when her day was over and she lay awake in the little bedroom in Mrs. Hack's house, Miss Batten dreamed that the two people who filled her life with its echo of romance would come to love each other. She was deeply sentimental, and she still dallied with the gorgeous dream of love at second-hand. Inspired by certain indications she had noticed, she became alert and eager, and threw her puny forces on the side of her idol. She guessed his secret, and, in the knowledge of it, she spoke of him to Cathy with eternal adulation.

But if Cathy was kind to Batkins, out of a wide heart, Monica Henstock was kinder still, and her kindness took a strictly practical form.

Six months' training had made Miss Batten into a qualified secretary, and, though she had still much to learn, Monica decided that she was quite sufficiently skilled to take up the duty of answering her professional correspondence, seeing people and arranging interviews, and generally making herself of use in the small house with the brass plate on the door. Thus, Miss Batten was removed from Bayswater and inhabited an upper bedroom under the roof of Monica Henstock. She admired Dr. Henstock but felt slightly afraid of her. At times, her sword-like directness of speech alarmed Miss Batten, as did her quite off-hand and natural allusions to the experience which the ex-governess had put away from her.

The strange part of the whole arrangement was that somehow, and quite unexpectedly, Miss Batten found herself in the very centre of a ring, composed of Monica, Cathy and Lorrimer.

Her life was a busy one and there was not very much time for thought, but occasionally she felt that Monica really did not either like or want her very much. It was another act of kindness, perhaps? The world had turned so fiercely kind ever since . . . she stopped abruptly, for she did not wish to recall the Restaurant "Voyons." The room where she sat was warm and comfortable and her own little bedroom opened off it. Outside, there was a narrow landing, and from there you could, by looking downwards like the "Blessed Damozel," see the hall below.

Opposite to Batkins, on the wall, there was fastened a large poster, encircled by the W.S.P.U. colours. It depicted a woman blowing a trumpet and waving a flag, upon which was written, in old English lettering, the great word "Liberty." All this was now *vieux jeu* and the days of battle were over, but the word attracted Miss Batten, and frequently inspired her to get up and look over the banisters outside.

She began with a firmly outlined idea of Dr. Henstock's great contempt towards men, and it was only very gradually she began to realise that there was certainly one exception to the rule. If Lorrimer was expected, Monica would use any subterfuge to avoid being absent, and the sick might call for her, and anxious friends and relations ring up in vain. Miss Batten, whose conscience was tender, became aware that there was a strain of ruthlessness in Monica, which showed under stress of strong feeling. One day, when Dr. Henstock had been in a communicative mood, and had spoken to Batkins as though she regarded her as a friend, Miss Batten had all but confided the great romance to what she imagined to be sympathetic ears. But, luckily, she had stopped short. Some instinct struck her dumb, just in time, and she sat in the firelight and listened spellbound to Monica's views on the furnishing of Lorrimer's flat. She *had* furnished it. That very day the whole toil had been completed, and Monica could not entirely veil her triumphant joy.

"Cathy Rossiter has taken him up," she added, "but he can't have thought very much of her taste." Dr. Henstock paused. "Did you ever hear her say what she thought of Colonel Lorrimer?"

Miss Batten burst into eulogy, her ears tingling, and with a feeling as though she had a frightened mouse inside her, instead of a heart. Monica was not pleased. She took up a book and began to read it firmly. It was at that point that Batkins suddenly became illuminated. She saw that Monica was a woman whose mind is made up. Dr. Henstock had decided to marry Colonel Lorrimer, and, such being the case, where was the wonderful romance, which connected itself entirely with Cathy, likely to disappear to?

She looked at Monica with new eyes, and saw the strength in her brow and the formation of her nose. Dr. Henstock, for all her fragility, had a "passionate nostril." She also noted the mouth, which Monica used freely in grimace, and she trembled. She loved Lorrimer with a purely impersonal love, as one loves someone who is limitlessly wiser, greater and kinder than oneself. Cathy was her ideal woman, and Cathy's urgent, impulsive talk always intoxicated Batkins pleasantly. It thrilled her to hear Cathy talk red Republicanism, while she looked like a queen.

If Monica Henstock had vowed in her heart to marry Lorrimer, what possible chance had he of escape?

Monica put down the book, closing it, instead of laying it open astride her knee, because she was thoughtful about bindings and respected books, treating them carefully.

"People should always marry in their own class," Monica said, and Batkins bowed silently in assent. "You have heard Miss Rossiter talk of equality, but she is quite the last person living who knows what is meant by the word. If a man marries above him, socially, it puts him at a disadvantage; if a woman marries beneath her, it's always taken as an evidence of coarseness."

"But," objected Miss Batten, "if two people love each other. . . ."

Dr. Henstock shrugged her shoulders. She had written a treatise on the subject of married love, which emphatically stated that it was all a matter of animal instinct.

Monica crossed her well-shod feet one over the other, and Miss Batten noticed that she was wearing expensive silk stockings. "If marriage is to be a reasonably successful affair, it should be based upon similarity of origin as well as of taste."

Miss Batten's mind wandered. She was beginning to grow inwardly restless, when the distant sound of an electric bell made Monica change as by enchantment. She faltered in the middle of a phrase and lost the thread of her discourse; her pale skin flushed and she made a jerky movement with her hands.

"If this should be Colonel Lorrimer, you need not stay," she remarked almost nervously, and at once Miss Batten arose to go. She had to believe, on evidence, that Dr. Henstock was kind to her and wanted her society, but her own instinct suggested that another motive was mixed in with altruism. Cathy's kindness was as different as two things, calling themselves by the same name, well could be, and Batkins picked up a notebook and a pencil and withdrew herself humbly.

In the hall she encountered Lorrimer, who was taking off his overcoat. It was a racy-looking coat, and the soft hat he wore had a sporting suggestion. He looked happy, and his thick figure barred her path. There was a smell of Harris tweed cigars, and frosty air in the small space, and Lorrimer had brought them there. Miss Batten's heart leaped, and she touched his outheld hand, feeling almost as though she would drop at his feet. There were times when this vast human being literally charged upon her and overcame her in his power.

He made some quite ordinary remark, and told her that she looked pale, suggested that Dr. Henstock was overworking her, and, as she felt that this was meant as a joke, she gave a weak little laugh. He was going to talk to Dr. Henstock like a father . . . how little he really knew of relationships. . . . He was not going to have her turned into a slave, because, what would Miss Rossiter say? Had she seen Miss Rossiter lately?

Miss Batten summoned up a great courage and spoke.

"I think Miss Rossiter has been busy," she said. "I took two calls from her lately, as Dr. Henstock was out. Each time Miss Rossiter said that she wanted Dr. Henstock to go with her to a meeting at the Progress Club."

Lorrimer bit the side of his forefinger and looked down, looked sideways, and then looked at Miss Batten.

"Did *she* go?" he asked, nodding towards the drawing-room.

Miss Batten shook her head, and made a silent "No" with her lips.

"Why?"

"Dr. Henstock objects." Batkins looked at him imploringly. She would be in disgrace for keeping him in the hall, yet still he blocked the way. "She does not improve," she added in her meek voice, and Lorrimer made himself comparatively smaller and permitted her to pass.

She went up the staircase and looked down from the upper landing. Lorrimer was still there. He was thinking, with his hands in his coat pockets, and he was not satisfied. From her vantage ground Miss Batten watched him open the drawing-room door and go in, she heard the raised voice of Monica giving him welcome as though he were the last person she expected to see, and then the door closed, and Miss Batten had perforce to retire into her own room, where the fire needed attention.

As she blew the little flames and nursed them into strength, her pale, insignificant face was troubled and distressed, and her thin hands shook and trembled. It would be awful if Monica intervened—awful, awful, and again awful.

When Lorrimer had accepted Monica's welcome, he sat down and stretched out his legs. He had a great many things to tell her. It is not enough to be successful, one must also have an audience, and Monica was a thoroughly trustworthy listener. She was as much interested in Lorrimer as he was in himself.

A second before she had been madly angry, and sat in her chair white and tense. After all, she had her own deeply rooted disbelief in man, and she knew that Batkins had transgressed. In a second she was suspicious of them both, and felt that, for all she knew, there might be some hidden attraction in her secretary. She had trembled on the very edge of a scene, and it took all her powers of command to control her own sudden emotion. The delayed entrance of Lorrimer altered everything in a flash, and she knelt before him in spirit, very much as Miss Batten had done.

He had been thinking of Cathy as he stood outside the door, but, when he saw Monica, he thought of himself again. Things had been happening, things of the very greatest interest, and he demanded her attention at once.

He had lunched with Stockton, dined with him, and had met a number of his colleagues. It was flattering enough, but what followed was even more so. He had been invited to stay for a week-end with Culworth Jesson, who was organiser in chief of the Progressive Party. He waited for Monica's enthusiastic applause to die down and went on retrospectively. He knew that they were "soundin' " him, and he was careful to give nothing away.

There had been no ladies in the party at Fratton, Culworth Jesson's huge country place. Women played a very small part in the busy lives of these men whose game was the ruling of Empire and whose playground was the map of Europe. Lorrimer had adopted one or two new mannerisms and added several new words to his limited vocabulary. Monica listened and was happy. He had grown very much more sure of himself, and he no longer regarded Monica with his old touch of schoolboy awe; and yet she was wonderfully necessary to his life. Cathy listened and was interested, but she was, of necessity, not impressed by his successes. She did not know how very successful he really was.

Lorrimer looked at Monica's eyes and thick, red hair. She was lacking in some special charm, but she had splendid qualities, and as he looked he felt a kind of fleeting sorrow to know that she could not now awaken the thrills and trembles which are part of the mystery of love.

"Stockton told me," he said, lighting a cigarette, "that Jesson is anxious to get men who are not professional politicians into the Progressive Party. There is to be a by-election down in Buckinghamshire, the Kingslade constituency, and, as I have been in treaty with Lennard and Moreton for Kingslade Park, it is quite possible," he paused, and tried to speak as though it was a merely ordinary matter, "that they may ask me to stand."

Monica held out her hands to him and he took them, squeezed them hard and laid them carefully back on her knees. She was tender, now; inexhaustibly interested in his interests, glad as a mother, and tremulously proud and elated.

Lorrimer talked on.

"It is only a possibility," he said, suddenly remembering that he had no guarantee for any assertion, "and, of course, absolutely confidential."

"Does Cathy know?" she asked, and she covered up the sharp little edge which was hidden in the question with an added sweetness of voice. She felt that she must hear from him whether he had made her his first confidence or not.

"I have told no one but you," Lorrimer replied, and it seemed to Monica that the whole world became radiant.

"I shouldn't say anything." Monica brushed a strand of silk off her neat skirt. "Cathy is an angel, but she isn't always safe. She might let it all out to Twyford, or Gordon Sutton, that unspeakable idiot; they will certainly have a man of their own for Kingslade. Have you really bought Kingslade Park?"

"I shall buy it," Lorrimer leaned back comfortably. He *did* like Monica. Why was marriage so difficult a problem, and why couldn't he feel that she was all he wanted? She had a way of making Cathy less impressive when she spoke of her, and yet Cathy herself refuted this lessening every time he saw her.

Kingslade was a large, imposing-looking house, standing in the centre of a compact estate, and, though Lorrimer might have become the owner of a more pretentious dwelling, there was a great deal of solid effect connected with its possessorship. He passed on with a rather elephantine rapidity from the question of Kingslade, and returned to his possible nomination as a Progressive candidate.

"Don't think that I meant that Cathy isn't to be trusted," Monica said, with a sudden, gentle little drop in her voice, "only, you know as well as I do, that she gets so very enthusiastic it makes her forget that one can't speak of everything without reserve."

"At present it is a secret," Lorrimer said, and he looked rather gloomy.

He disliked the idea of a woman being over-communicative; his own sisters "told" upon all occasions. Their latest friends were always informed of everything, and they showed letters and shared confidences freely. Surely Cathy was not capable of the same error in taste.

"Have you seen Miss Rossiter lately?" he asked; he was certainly not going to discuss her, even with Monica.

"Not very." Monica fumbled under the table and returned to the green silk tie which she intended for Jack. "I had to indulge myself in plain speech, and Cath was hurt."

Her hands were quite cool, and she knew that the emotional point had been passed and left behind for the time being. Lorrimer was too much occupied with himself to drift into the misty regions where she had waited for him in vain. She knitted rapidly.

"She is getting swept into the Danielli lot. Perhaps you don't know who I mean?"

"Never heard of them."

"Danielli is a wild, good-looking Republican. The sort of man who talks about the 'March Revolution,' or 'Bloody Friday,' and dates everything with a cataclysm. He is mixed up with all the strikes, and in with the extreme Labour Group. Where Cathy happened on the creature I don't know. All I *do* know is that she ought to be prevented. She has joined the Progress Club and talks all the jargon. 'Soviets,' 'Workmen's Deputies,' 'Federations,'" she gave a quick laugh. "She is calling for the Deluge, poor Cath, dressed in white chiffon and without the least idea of what it feels like to be drenched to the skin."

"And this fellow—this Danielli?" Lorrimer was stiff and angry and spoke with a touch of heat.

"Some kind of mongrel agitator. Cathy was down at Hoxton with the 'Pure Milk' gang; I'm in with them myself and have acted on their committee. Danielli, who is always on the look-out for discontented crowds, came down there, or this is Cathy's account of it, with Mrs. Greenaway."

"Who's she?" Lorrimer demanded shortly.

He thought that the whole thing was most annoying. No one, not even Cathy, can afford to be alluded to as "One of *that* crowd!"

"She is sub-editor of *The Future*. Clever," Monica stopped and counted her stitches, "but can't talk of anything but shop stewards. Cathy, as usual, embraced her as a sister."

Monica laughed indulgently and glanced at Lorrimer. He was leaning over his knees, and his face was heavy and dull.

"Do you think that these friendships of hers are a danger?" he asked slowly. It was as though the idea troubled him profoundly.

"She will get over them." Monica put down her knitting, and, in doing so, gave Lorrimer a sense of relief.

"When she marries Twyford she will have other things to think about."

"Oh, yes," Lorrimer agreed.

"Only I think we should combine to prevent her going too far. Cathy permits herself the wildest liberties."

Monica looked at the fire; there had been a time, when she was fighting for the enfranchisement of women, when she too had used rather extreme language.

"Danielli is one of these lunatics," she went on, "who looks the part. Tall, thin, eager and voluble. Cathy said that he spoke like a torrent; I suggested a burst water-pipe. He is a vegetarian and a teetotaller, and gets his sensations out of words and, probably, women. I thought that he looked like a civilised performing tiger."

"Why the devil don't they put him in the Zoo?" Lorrimer said, getting to his feet. "I'm very sorry, Monica, and I agree that it's time Miss Rossiter's friends did something. What's Twyford thinking about, if the fella' is really engaged to her?"

"Himself," replied Monica laconically.

"Well, there's that other blighter who is always there, Amyas."

Monica laughed spontaneously.

"Robert Amyas! What would you expect him to do? He is anæmic and poetic; one condition working on the other. I should like to write him a prescription, but as for his doing anything, he will only make Cathy more determined than ever."

"They are a wretched, useless collection of idiots," Lorrimer said in his haste. "I don't wonder she is so fed up."

The whole pleasant sense of great things coming to him had been disturbed by this talk of Cathy. She really was going too far and her dignity would become imperilled. He bestrode the hearthrug and frowned down at his boots.

"I don't think it is the moment for you to stand out," he said at last. "You are the best of friends, Monica, and if the girl wants sensible advice you can give it."

"I tell you I *have*. Oceans of it."

"Look how well you managed all the business about Miss Batten."

Monica shook her head.

"Oh, that was nothing to speak of. I never mix up things, as you know, Jack. Until Batkins strayed from the path of virtue Cathy was rather bored with her, but her love for sinners made her wildly enthusiastic the moment she thought that she was dealing with a potential prostitute. If Twyford had any sense, and wanted to bring things to a head, all he need do is to get himself arrested on a charge of murder. Cathy lacks a proper sense of proportion, and she demands that anyone who wants her shall be suffering from some social eclipse. It is all very well, but it annoys me. I am her greatest friend and I see the danger to her."

"Then, for God's sake, do something."

Lorrimer's feeling broke into his voice, and Monica pressed her body against the back of her chair, much as a patient under the hands of a dentist draws away from a fiery sting of pain. Gaps there might be between her and Lorrimer, but gaps may be bridged across, and she saved herself with a fierce effort.

"Of course I will," she said, and then she got up and held out her hand. "I have to turn you out, Jack; it's time I got myself ready for rather a ticklish operation I am due to perform to-night. Come soon again, and be sure to tell me if you hear anything more of Jesson and the Kingslade election."

Lorrimer held her hand for a second and went away. She seemed wonderfully level and calm at that moment, and what she had said about Cathy was, in a measure, true. There was a hint, no more than that, of emotionalism in Cathy's enthusiasms, and she did not really sift and weigh her own principles. She was governed by impulse and her love of individuals. The distant idea of this unwashed Danielli was sickening, and Lorrimer bought a copy of *The Future* as he passed a paper shop, in case there should be some account of the man in its pages. He was not disappointed, and he studied the blurred print which showed a gaunt-looking man with high cheek-bones and deep-set eyes. Danielli had been born in a jail and educated in a reformatory; he had been a stoker, a scavenger, a field labourer, and drifted into Europe; from Europe he drifted back to England, by a long and circuitous path, and all the time he had gathered in a rancorous class hatred which had its outlet in impassioned impeachments of Capitalists. Lorrimer crumpled up the paper, as he sat by the fire in the smoking-room of his flat, and consigned Danielli and all his works to Hades. When it came to Cathy taking a hand in such absurd bellowings it was time that Danielli should be exterminated.

He heard the flap of his letter-box registering the fact that the postman had come. The post interest, strong in every human heart, leaped up at once in Lorrimer, and he did not wait for his man to collect the envelopes from the box, but went himself.

There were some bills, but bills had no terrors for him; there was a letter from Lennard and Moreton, concluding the sale of the Kingslade estate, and there was a short line from Jesson's secretary, saying that Mr. Jesson would like to make an appointment with Colonel Lorrimer during the week, and mentioning two particular days when it would be possible. As well as this there was a long letter from his mother, who had never grasped the fact that her son was grown up, and who knew nothing about Kingslade. You could not ask Mrs. Lorrimer to govern at Kingslade Park—and if not his mother, who then?

Was it to be Monica, with her attractive looks and her repulsive habit of talking of lancets and thermometers, and calling a sore throat or a cut finger by some awful medical name. A woman who could identify every gland and vein in the whole clothed-over human body? Kingslade, where the Sandowns had revelled in ignorance of the real names of their bones? Kingslade, which had been the stage scene of a sensational romance, and where thousands had been lost and won in a night's play? It would be utterly inartistic to put either Mrs. Lorrimer, portly and common and full of a deadly assurance, now that she had a large balance at the bank, or Monica Henstock, at the head of the historic table, round which even crowned heads had once gathered.

Cathy, without or even with her Daniellis, Cathy, with her way of coming into a room, and her wonderful, eager face, all alight like sunshine, would be the real soul of Kingslade. If Twyford meant to marry her he had better look sharp about it. Lorrimer turned to the letter from Jesson's secretary; it was coming, he knew that quite well. Without anyone to push him, without a friend in London, except a few old retired Colonels whom he had known as a subaltern, he had made his conquering way to recognition and future success.

CHAPTER VIII

Cathy Rossiter was in a state of considerable excitement as she stood in Lady Carstairs' room. Lady Carstairs was sitting before her looking-glass, dressed in a wonderful garment of grey watered silk, inset with embroidered medallions. A chain of diamonds lay around her neck, glittering in the light as she breathed or moved. She wore a small patch of lace on her head, to cover a thin parting, and long, pear-shaped pearls hung at her large ears, inducing people to look at what they might otherwise have avoided.

Cathy had not changed for dinner, and was evidently going out as soon as it was over, for she carried a velvet cap in her hand and a wide, turquoise-blue scarf; her white silk blouse was open at the neck, and Lady Carstairs remarked that her niece would return with a cold.

"If, indeed, you get nothing worse, Cathy. I do so dislike this new craze of yours. Why will you go to these places?"

"It's quite a nice place, Aunt Amy," Cathy replied with her invariable good humour, and she wandered to the dressing-table. "The Progress Club is very clean. Mrs. Greenaway chose all the wall-papers." She kissed her aunt's nose, and, taking up a wad of cotton-wool, began to powder her chin. "We're all Puritans there, and you bring your own powder."

Lady Carstairs shook her head.

"*The Times* spoke of Danielli; it seems that he is probably a Jew."

"Well, if he is?" Cathy pulled up a chair and sat down. "So was Christ."

Lady Carstairs looked desperately affronted. "Hush! Cathy," she said in a tone of horror; it was quite evident that she felt something blasphemous had been said.

Cathy reflected that if you don't keep God out of your conversation you make everyone dreadfully self-conscious —even bishops.

Lady Carstairs coughed, and took up a brooch from her tray of trinkets. It was a very beautiful ornament and was one of the Carstairs' heirlooms. When Elizabeth married she would have it to wear on her wedding gown. It lay in her hand for a second, and she looked at it, though her thoughts were busy with Cathy.

"I feel sure that you ought not to expose your throat," said Lady Carstairs, and she bent forward, and, putting the brooch, which was a heavy emerald surrounded by diamonds, into Cathy's blouse, she fastened the folds of silk across and patted her on the cheek. "Take care of that, dear," she said affectionately, "and where did you leave Mrs. ——? I can't recall her name."

"Janey Greenaway," Cathy said, arranging a wandering lock of hair; "I left her in my room with a packet of gaspers."

"A what?"

"Gaspers," Cathy laughed; "fags, aunt. Janey smokes gaspers all day and even in her dreams. She won't do it at dinner, here, because I warned her not to, but usually she does. When I was staying in her flat off Paradise Causeway down in Poplar, she cooked breakfast with one in her mouth. Wasn't that clever?"

Lady Carstairs sighed deeply.

"I suppose she has short hair," she said, as though she added one more damning fact to an already overwhelming mountain of evidence.

"To here." Cathy indicated her ear lobes and laughed again. "She is very plain, I suppose, but she is alive."

"What does Twyford say to all this?"

Lady Carstairs got up and showed signs of being ready to descend to dinner.

"He says that—— Oh, never mind him, dearest, he is always saying the same things."

She took her aunt's arm and they walked out of the large room together. Cathy loved Lady Carstairs, and yet she could not resist the temptation to tease her.

"Why don't you marry him?"

They were at the head of the staircase when Lady Carstairs asked the question suddenly, and Cathy turned her violet blue eyes to her face with a kind of mute reproach.

"I don't want to," she said, her lightness forsaking her quite suddenly. "We couldn't go on being friends and there wouldn't be anything else for us to be. I think he understands that."

"But, my dear, you are getting on." Lady Carstairs, having decided upon plain speech, and undertaken it in the passage, was under self-determined difficulties, for she feared to be overheard and had to modulate her tones carefully. "I mean that you are always charming, but it is wiser to marry before thirty. You are twenty-nine, Cathy, and——"

"I'm very hungry, darling, and Janey and I have to be at Hammersmith by 8.30. We'll talk all this over another time."

She rushed her aunt down the wide staircase, and they found Mrs. Greenaway in the hall, looking at the portraits which hung there, with a hard, contemptuous gaze.

"It always occurs to me," she said, addressing Lady Carstairs, "that to get yourself painted is one of the most ridiculously egotistical acts of an amazingly self-satisfied class. Look at your own family portraits, Lady Carstairs; if I may say so, they merely go to prove that, in the past, your ancestors looked greedy and respectable. This man, for instance," she indicated a bishop, whose puffy cheeks bulged out over a white choker, and whose hand rested on an open book. "Does he look as though he was hungering and thirsting after righteousness, or as if he really was pure in heart? The lines around his mouth are clear proof of sensuality."

Cathy caught her by the shoulders and turned her from the picture.

"Leave them alone," she said, "they are all dead, rest their souls."

"You are speaking of a remarkably good man," Lady Carstairs said, with the utmost politeness; "a man who gave his life for the good of others. My great uncle, Bishop Footner."

"Of course, if he died for his people," Jane Greenaway said in a more mollified voice, "I don't so much object to him."

"He passed away in his bed," Lady Carstairs said reservedly, as Mrs. Greenaway studied the pattern of birds of paradise on her soup plate.

Dinner went through very awkwardly, and, at the end, Cousin Otho appeared, spick and span and bearing a ticket for a box at the Carnival, where a musical comedy was in the height of its popularity. He had thought to capture Cathy; Lorrimer had said he would turn up.

"And what in the world is taking you to Hammersmith?" Otho asked.

"If you would come too, it might teach you some sense," said Janey Greenaway, who, by special permission wrung from Lady Carstairs, was smoking a gasper.

"I don't want to be taught sense," he retorted, "I learned it long ago, dear lady; unless, of course, you are going to give me special lessons."

"Come, Janey," Cathy got up and snatched at her hat and muffler, "we must not be late."

"And my box at the Carnival?" Otho demanded.

"I expect you can find someone else."

It was Mrs. Greenaway's answer, and she put a world of meaning into it. Otho and his white shirt front irritated her. She hated his well-bred, drawling voice and his insincerity. She hated his bad manners, though her own were far worse, and she wished that he could hear Danielli talking about the leisured classes.

"Hurry, hurry," said Cathy, who was thinking only of the lecture.

"Danielli doesn't speak until after Osterov has finished," Mrs. Greenaway said, tying on her own scarf.

"And what is Comrade Osterov going to talk of?" Otho looked at her maliciously.

"The hygiene of the mind," she replied, and shut her strong, ugly mouth with a kind of snap.

Cathy kissed her aunt and stood for a little, in spite of her eagerness to be gone, sparring with Otho, and when she and Mrs. Greenaway went out into the February night and the falling snow, Lady Carstairs looked at her nephew and sighed.

"I do not like this Mrs. Greenaway," she said, "she was really most rude about poor Uncle Brabazon. I don't know what the world is coming to, Otho. Cathy has picked up the strangest manner of talking." She flushed, and glanced nervously at Otho, who sat down at the table. "I hardly like to speak of it, but she asked me just now if I loved God."

Otho fiddled with a wine glass, a beautiful purple thing with white stars cut over the fine, clear colour beneath.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, and then he took out his cigarette case and obtained permission to smoke. "To think of Cathy getting bitten by that kind of microbe. The truth is, Aunt Amy, Cathy must marry."

"But she told me she will not marry Twyford."

"He isn't the only man in the world."

"Robert Amyas would be a disaster. Ever since he divorced that unfortunate Lilian, Cathy has been sorry for him, and he is often here."

Lady Carstairs fell deeper and deeper into the slough of despond.

"I have an idea," Otho remarked after a moment of silence, "that Lorrimer is in love with Cathy."

Lady Carstairs screwed up her mouth; she was not enthusiastic.

"Very *bourgeois,*" she said in her cold, un-vibrant voice; "quite common."

"Lots of money, and not a bad sort. I thought Cathy seemed to like him. She was very enthusiastic over the great Batten affair."

"Utterly out of the question." Again, Lady Carstairs looked as though she had taken a dose of quinine. "If Cathy was a poor girl, without money of her own, I might think differently, but she is entirely independent, and Twyford has been in love with her for years. She is sure to marry him."

Otho got up and said good night. He had put in a word for Colonel Lorrimer, and, having done so, there was nothing to detain him.

Cathy was not thinking of her matrimonial prospects as she and Mrs. Greenaway arrived at the Progress Club in Hammersmith. She was warmed and thrilled, despite the falling snow and the difficulty of getting anywhere, and her cheeks were flushed with pleasurable anticipation. It seemed to her that she had really found a group of people who all held her own views; views which she had expressed since she was sixteen, and for expressing which she had more than once been dismissed from her father's table. She was not really alone in feeling that the world was wretchedly badly organised, and that there must be something hopelessly wrong in a place where some people owned four or five large houses while others were crowded into dirty tenement dwellings. A world where a week's loss of work meant starvation, and where this dread haunted the huge majority. There was no fairness in the rules by which rich men protected themselves, and ground the poor, who could not fight even for the common decencies and comforts of life. She had seen her own class brooding like a huge vampire over the seething pot below; never thinking of the pain and suffering of the needy and over-burdened worker. They only desired to play and to eat expensive food, to spend ridiculous sums on clothes, and to entertain perpetually. Through them, the whole trend of the world was turned towards display and away from simplicity. The Court, with its state and its demand for a blind trust in kings, was a survival, like the Lord Mayor's Show, but those of her own house were prepared to bow with false reverence and keep up the paste-board erection eternally. Not content with the imposition of earthly monarchs, the Church, hand-in-hand with the State, established a God who was as narrow-minded and ignorant as the most limited of conventional rulers.

Now she had actually found that she had countless upholders, and that a democratic awakening, which she seemed to perceive dimly, was flooding the whole earth, and Cathy believed that the people who gathered in the Progress Club were inspired by a very simple faith indeed.

The room where the meeting was being held was not very large. It was, in fact, two rooms, one opening off the other, and there was no formality about the gathering. As there were not nearly chairs enough, people sat on the floor, or on the flat tops of the bookcases round the walls; and they were all very young. One or two of the women obviously came from Cathy's own class, but for the most part their origin was indistinct, and many were foreigners. One woman, with a thick, black plait of hair down her back, was dressed in a curious patchwork garment, dazzling in colour and futurist of design. She was smoking a short pipe, and appeared to be engrossed in Osterov's address, which was drawing to a close. The men were distressing to Cathy. Why was it that no normal looking man, decently dressed, ever came there? A few were dandies, but they got the wrong suggestion, and wore incipient whiskers and over-brilliant ties. Some were pale, earnest men, taking life very seriously, who were mostly conscientious objectors. Not shirkers; you could tell that, but really and certainly convinced that they had been obliged to let other men take the risks of war on their behalf. One of them made a place for Cathy and found her a chair, which she shared with Janey Greenaway. If you put Cathy into hell, some man would immediately be certain to find her a chair to sit on.

Osterov finished his speech and sat down. There was no raised dais, only a small table with a carafe and a glass of water standing on it, and the room was thick with cigarette smoke. Just in front of where Cathy sat, two girls, one who looked about twenty-two, and the other possibly a little older, were discussing venereal disease. They seemed to have read everything about it, and the delicate looking girl, the younger of the two, was saying that, when the plea of contamination was established in a divorce case, the man or woman charged with the offence should be liable under criminal law.

"I have read all the N.C.C.V.D. literature," the older girl said, in a calm, rather weary voice. "It is time that women did something about it. Do you know that every fourth man in the British Army is infected?"

"I should have put the figure higher," the pale girl replied, fixing a gold hoop earring more securely.

She looked as though she should have been at a dance, thinking of the partners on her programme, but she appeared to Cathy as a monster of terrible wisdom; something like Monica in her bad moods, only Monica was a doctor, and she had to know these horrors.

Silence fell almost at once, as Danielli got up and stood smiling down the room. He was strong, and his eyes were clear; more humorous really than defiant, and he was not very tall. Near him, and sitting in an easy attitude, there was another man. Lanky, and loosely built, with a narrow face, fair hair and deep, smouldering blue eyes. He was hopelessly untidy, and he wore his clothes carelessly, yet, in some way, he was quite obviously different to the others.

"Who is the man with a suggestion of Pan about him?" Cathy asked in a whisper.

"Major Barlow," Janey Greenaway answered. "He was a soldier once, but of course he wouldn't fight in the war. You wouldn't guess that he was born with every sort of disadvantage. Harrow, Cambridge, all that tosh. They sent him to prison——"

"Hush," said a voice near them, and Janey nodded amiably to the woman with the black plait of hair and the pipe.

Danielli looked down the room again and caught Cathy's eye. He made no actual sign of recognition, but one knew that he was pleased to see her there.

People who expected impassioned oratory from Danielli, and went to the Progress Club to hear him talk heroics, were likely to be disappointed. He did indulge himself in wild speeches, but only when he had a suitable audience. The listeners sitting on the floor, on seats, and crowded along the walls, were intellectuals, and did not require kerosene oil to make them flame. He made very few gestures, and hardly ever raised his voice above his normal tone, which was always sonorous rather than loud, and he avoided catch words, just as Osterov, who had finished speaking, indulged freely in them, and as Barlow, who spoke later, could not open his mouth without uttering some well-worn phrase, such as "the piping times of peace."

Gradually Cathy felt herself rising to the crest of a wave of feeling that swung through the room, and she saw Danielli as the Hebrews of old saw Moses.

He came from the table where he had stood, and when he had spoken with one and another he made his way to where Cathy and Mrs. Greenaway were sitting, and gave Cathy his right and Mrs. Greenaway his left hand, and pulling a cushion towards him and sat down at their feet. He seemed to slide into a wonderfully intimate attitude both of body and mind, and Cathy wondered if he were really a "dark stranger," like the star which any day might rush out of space, driven upon a huge celestial adventure, breaking up the ordered routine of civilisation. He had preached a doctrine which ended the world for those of her class, and she had listened, knowing that they were all to be destroyed. Danielli was the "dark stranger," and already his attraction was beginning to drag the earth from its old, steady course. She looked at the top of his dark head. It was so odd, so *bizarre,* in a way, to have him sitting there, all but leaning against her knee, and talking now and then in his persuasive voice.

"Are the men really backing up the shop stewards?" Mrs. Greenaway asked, in her clear, incisive tones.

"You may always trust an engineer," Danielli said, and he talked rapidly of skilled time rates, and the report of a Workers' Committee which had just come in, and then Barlow got up and began to speak.

He was a convert, and, like all converts, was more extreme than anyone else, and he began with the Public Schools system and carried the sword onwards through the Universities and the Services. What he really wanted to do about it was not very clear, but he was intensely earnest, and felt that his own education had been no good.

Cathy became intensely interested at once; she felt that Barlow knew his subject, and she applauded with the crowd, and, once or twice, entirely on her own.

"Why don't you speak yourself, when Barlow has done?" Danielli said in a whisper. "You'd be splendid on a platform."

"I should lose my wits at once," she said, smiling down at his raised face; "I'm far too tangled, I get everything in a mix up."

She paused, and felt as though she had proclaimed herself a coward, and Barlow, who was prepared to go on for any length of time, began to attack the Churches.

"Will you come and help us down in Labury Road?" Danielli asked. "The men on the 9th Division of the Electricians' Association are out, and there is a desperate lot to do. We are trying to keep the strike stiff, but we want help. Women are always the trouble," he smiled his familiar, friendly smile, "you always ask for security. Won't you come and talk to them?"

"When I get a passport and am able to go to Berlin, I shall tell the German workman that, in England, we are their brothers, for we are determined that the people shall rule the world," said Barlow violently to the audience.

"What could I do?" Cathy bent down, and the faint violet scent she used floated towards Danielli. "Are they hungry and in want?"

"When are the poor anything else?" he said. "Perhaps if you saw the actual conditions you might become entirely one with us."

Cathy hesitated. It was not that she had the smallest doubt of her own beliefs, but she felt suddenly that Lady Carstairs would be horribly upset. It was stupid and ridiculous to think of that at such a moment, but it caused her to pause, and Danielli to look at her searchingly.

"I don't ask, nor do any of us, for charity," he said; "don't fancy that I meant cheques or donations."

"We always want funds," Mrs. Greenaway interposed.

"Cathy Rossiter is going to help us that way and every other way."

Barlow had come to an end of what he had to say, and the crowd in the room broke up into groups, but Danielli did not stir. He wanted to talk to Cathy.

"Labury Road isn't far away," he said, "and, unless you are in a hurry to get back, we might go down there and look around us. What do you say, Janey?"

Mrs. Greenaway agreed at once. She was used to being out and about at all hours, and Barlow joined them, and immediately said that he would come too, though he looked at Cathy distrustfully.

"You aren't one of us," he said, "I don't know that you ought to be here at all. Why have you come?"

"Don't try to snub me, Major Barlow," she said quickly. "I am a human being just as much as you are."

"Come on then," he said authoritatively, "and look at your brothers and sisters. I doubt if you'll care very much for the family party."

Cathy's subsequent recollections of her visit to Labury Road were vivid and terrible. She saw what Danielli wished her to see, and she stood to witness the protest of people who were hungry, cold and wretched. Here was the real England, the inarticulate mass, dark, submerged, and struggling; their hoarse voices crying in the wilderness of dark insanitary houses, and their lives made ugly and brutal through lack of leisure and lack of hope. She saw crowds and crowds of faces, and the faces haunted her imagination.

"This is not a very glorious dwelling, is it, Miss Rossiter?" Danielli said, as they stood on the filthy, broken steps of a battered, dreary house. "Yet the wretched creatures who are packed inside it are deadly afraid of losing its shelter."

"What can I *do?*" Cathy asked desperately. She was moved beyond expression, and thought of her own luxury and ease with something akin to repulsion.

Mrs. Greenaway and Barlow were already inside the house, talking excitedly to a small group of men.

"They have lived like sewer rats for generations," Danielli went on; "their one form of relaxation drink, their morals filthy, and their children meagre, wretched little parodies of the children you meet in the Park."

Cathy felt in her bag. There was no money in it except a few shillings, and she moved to the door and just glanced within.

"Don't go in," Danielli said firmly. "Mrs. Greenaway is used to this kind of thing; but there is a dead baby on the table, and it might give you rather a shock."

"But why do they not put it somewhere else?" she asked.

"There *is* nowhere else," he said shortly.

"What can I do?" Cathy asked again, and she felt as though none of the wild things Barlow had said were exaggerated, not if you went and looked at the facts.

"Do?" Danielli smiled. He stood in the dim shaft of light from the open doorway, and the noise and smell that came through from within surrounded him intangibly. A policeman on the farther side of the street turned his bull's-eye lantern upon them, its wide ray falling upon Cathy Rossiter.

"Emerson wrote a great deal of nonsense," he said, moving a little so that Cathy was less under observation, "but at least he said this. 'Have you leisure, power, property, friends? You shall be the asylum and patron of every new thought, every improved opinion which proceeds from honest seeking. The highest compliment man ever receives from heaven is the sending to him its disguised and discredited angels.' These are the angels," he pointed to the gaunt house, "well disguised and finely discredited by the respectable. There is no other advice I can give you."

The policeman crossed the street and spoke to Danielli. He appeared to know him well and to like him, and then he asked Cathy who she was, and noted her address with obvious astonishment.

"They are in a bad way," he remarked as he moved off; "the Government will break the back of this strike."

"Will you take this?" Cathy seized upon the brooch at her neck. "I don't know that I ought to give it you, but it's very valuable, and I have nothing else. . . ."

He took it without enthusiasm, and said that he would see that the proceeds of its sale should go towards helping the children; and then Janey and Barlow joined them, and Barlow talked furiously as they walked through the slush and snow of Labury Road.

Cathy had tasted reality, and it stunned her senses; as she made her way home she could think of nothing else. She parted from Danielli and Barlow at the Tube Station, and Janey went back to the Progress Club, because she was always more than usually active at night.

Her nerves were tingling and she was raised to a pitch of wild enthusiasm as she opened the door with her latchkey. It was long after midnight, and everyone would be in bed. To her surprise, she saw, when she came in, that the light in the smoking-room was still turned on, and she closed the entrance door softly and walked across the hall. If some one died in this spacious house, there would be place and decency for death, she thought, and she pushed the door open, thinking that Rayner, the butler, must have forgotten to extinguish all the lights.

The fire had died down, but the room was warm, and the soft, thick carpet made her coming quite noiseless. At first Cathy thought that the room was empty, but, when she came round the screen, she saw that there was a visitor, lying asleep on the sofa, and she recognised with a start that it was Robert Amyas.

The humour of the situation struck her, relieving a little of the ugly tension of her mind, and she came towards him, intending to awaken him with a start. Really Robert was growing very casual, to say the least of it, and he deserved to be frightened. But, when she touched his shoulder, he did not stir, and for a moment a feeling of fear overtook her. She had tasted reality, and reality can be a thing of dread. For one second, she thought that she had returned to find Robert dead in Lady Carstairs' comfortable smoking-room.

He stirred uneasily but did not wake, and Cathy shook him violently. "Robert," she said, "don't be aggravating. Wake up at once."

Having tried every conceivable method by which she could recall him to his senses, Cathy gave it up as hopeless, and sat down, looking at his thin, petulant face and his open mouth. She thought it was possible that Robert was drunk, and the idea shocked her, but she also felt it to be more likely that he was drugged, and that did not seem so bad; though why, when it was certainly very much the more pernicious habit of the two, Cathy could not have explained. Perhaps if he knew that he snored when he drugged himself, he would relinquish the habit, she thought, as she watched him.

Just a little way away from him lay the Hammersmith slum, where people laid out their dead on the same table at which they ate their meals; and Robert, surfeited with the gifts of life, was driven to a chemist's shop to find another sensation for his feeble days. Cathy felt a sudden rage of anger sweep over her like a storm. Robert had been abusing Danielli only the day before; throwing cheap jibes at him and calling him a pro-German agitator. She bent down, and, setting her teeth, she took Amyas by the shoulders and shook him, and she saw Robert's eyes open, and he stared up at her, blindly at first, and then with slowly recovered recognition.

"Cathy," he said, sitting up, his hair disordered and his coat collar pulled up around his neck, for Cathy had not been gentle.

To allow oneself the physical satisfaction of an act which came close to chastisement, was rather overwhelming once it was done, and she regarded him a little awkwardly.

"I've been asleep," he said in a dull voice. "I said I'd sit up and wait for you. I must have fallen asleep."

His hands were hanging limply between his knees, and he shivered as though he felt very cold.

"Asleep," Cathy's voice was full of scorn. "You were drugged. It's no use lying to me, Robert."

Amyas made no reply for a moment, and then he adjusted his coat collar and tie, and smoothed his hair with his hands.

"Don't be so down on me," he said, looking up at her, his pierrot face drawn and white, and his eyes dark with a bruised look around the lids. "I can't sleep naturally. . . . It hardly matters what I do."

Cathy drew herself up, she was still on fire from her recent experiences.

"Have you nothing better to do?" she asked. "Is the world made just for your pleasure? Oh, Robert, you sicken me; you call yourself a man, I suppose, and you live like a parasite."

"Don't be cruel," he said, and he got up and stood wretchedly looking at her. "I've gone through a bad time."

"I don't want to be cruel," she retorted, and then she felt that, after all, she was talking to Robert, and Robert was only a nebulous fiction of a creature, so she softened a little.

"If you could have seen yourself—if you could have heard yourself snore!"

He laughed quite suddenly, almost a boyish laugh, and he held out his hands.

"I'll do penance, Cathy, I really will. I'd like to make you think better of me. You've been drinking, yourself—words, of course, but that's as bad as anything else. I'll go now, only do let me do something that will please you."

"You made me shake you," she said obstinately. "I have to forgive you for that as well."

"I'll go to one of your meetings; I'll join the Salvation Army, I'll be earnest and mean all I say. Come, Cathy, be a Christian; you ought to live up to your principles."

He pressed his hands to his forehead and looked around him as though his dreams still called him back, behind the curtains of sleep.

"Good night," she said, shortly. "I suppose you can let yourself out?"

Amyas pulled on his overcoat, which was lying on a chair. and held open the door to let her pass.

"But you will forgive me?" he asked.

Cathy stood in the hall considering. After all, her forgiveness meant very little, as she saw it, and she pondered for a time before she replied.

"I can forgive you," she said slowly. "But some day, you may find it quite impossible to forgive yourself."

"Myself?" he repeated the word. "Oh, I'm used to myself."

CHAPTER IX

Cousin Otho was in a state of astonishment and dismay. He was an extremely kind-hearted, well-meaning young man, and he had a strong sense of family ties. Cathy was beautiful, gracious, and now she was causing him acute distress. He did not mind what people said; a talker is always a talker; Cathy had talked for years and done very little. If it pleased her to say all kinds of wild things it did no real harm. Now, Cathy had gone further. "God be with the old days," Otho said in his heart, when he remembered how deeply they had all disapproved of Cathy's affection for Monica Henstock. Monica, who had done ten days in Holloway. What would they all not give now, to feel that Monica could still exercise an influence. But Danielli came from nowhere, and that was against him. He was a wild man, with nothing to lose by his wretched crusade against Capital; Barlow, on the other hand, was decently connected, and disgraced not only his household but his school and his whole training. It was kinder to suppose that the man was mad. Then there was Janey Greenaway. . . . Otho could hardly find polite words in which to express his sentiments towards her. She was a female hooligan, and her codes, moral and political, were simply disastrous. What did matter, and what continued to matter, was Danielli's wretched influence, and the haunting fear that Danielli might really intend to marry Cathy Rossiter.

It behoved the whole family to make a desperate effort, and yet, to permit any sign of desperation to appear would be fatal. In her distress of mind, Lady Carstairs had said that "even Robert Amyas would be better. Robert is at least a gentleman and not a strike leader."

Otho's friendship with Lorrimer had prospered, until at last it came to a stage when they both believed in it; and very often Cousin Otho made his way to the flat, inwardly criticising Monica's barbarous taste, and spoke of subjects close to his heart. Lorrimer was not as easily available as he had once been, for Stockton had become a pivot in his life, and the Kingslade election was soon to take place. Lorrimer was chosen by the Progressive Party as their nominee, and, what with the business of getting Kingslade Park into order, and making friends in his future constituency, Colonel Lorrimer was no longer at a loose end. But in all this Otho had been of invaluable service to him.

He walked into Lorrimer's dining-room in the flat one bright spring morning, when the trees were in bud and the earth was warm under a strong April sun. The dining-room was dark, and always looked cold in spite of its red walls, and Lorrimer was sitting at his breakfast table, glancing through letters, and looking rather dull and heavy. He was getting what he wanted—almost everything he wanted, but he was neither settled nor happy. He had seen very little of Cathy during the past month, and yet he could not stop thinking of her. Kingslade Park literally cried aloud for her, and she and no other was the fitting mistress for the beautiful old house. But how did one capture Cathy? Take out a butterfly net and rush madly after her as she sailed away on her gauzy wings? Sing under her window o' nights like a troubadour? He caught sight of his face in a glass that hung on the wall opposite to where he sat, and noticed that he looked older. He was growing heavy-looking, and his hair was turning a little grey. When he shaved in the morning—an ugly time with Lorrimer—the stubble on his chin was no longer mouse brown to match his hair.

Otho's arrival made a pleasant break. Lorrimer always felt better when he had seen Otho. He had begun by buying him with dinners and the use of one of his cars, and in the end Otho really liked Lorrimer. If this was so with Otho, why should not Cathy learn that there was something kind and fond, something protective and benignant in the heart and soul of Jack Lorrimer?

Otho had already breakfasted, but he was willing to drink a cup of hot coffee; he considered that the coffee was good, and after a time he began to unpack his troubles.

"It's getting dam' serious about Cathy," he said, and Lorrimer appreciated the compliment. Otho would not discuss Cathy with anyone except a close and trusted friend.

"Why?" he asked laconically.

"Well, there's this wretched fellow, Danielli. I've told you before that I thought the swine ought to be shot, but now it's all going beyond everything. She is leaving Cavendish Square."

"No!"

Lorrimer's flat denial of such a possibility was wrung from him in utter dismay.

"But it's yes," Otto said grimly. "I was there last night —went to see Aunt Amy, she rang me up, poor old dear, she is in an awful state. To begin with, Cathy gave this sweep a brooch which is an heirloom; the trustees may kick up the hell of a row, and Cathy actually can't be got to think of it seriously."

"She gave him an heirloom?" Lorrimer's face expressed the greatest concern, and he pushed away his plate and stared out of the window angrily.

"Precisely." Otho tapped his fingers noiselessly on the table-cloth. "We don't want it to be known about. Elizabeth is the loser, and, as she says she doesn't care a flitter, and that Cathy can do as she likes, it will be tided over. It's not so much the beastly brooch that has made us all very anxious, it's the hopeless attitude of Cathy herself."

"What *is* her attitude?" Lorrimer asked, pushing two fingers inside his collar, as though it had suddenly become very tight.

"She won't hear the smallest criticism of the man, and she says she is tired of having done nothing but talk."

Otho leaned forward and spoke again, adding weight to his words by swaying his forefinger in the air.

"Danielli is engineering a big general strike, and he has discovered that Cathy has persuasive qualities."

"Damn his skin." Lorrimer got up and began to pace the floor restlessly.

"He has induced her to agree to go and stay in Mrs. Greenaway's flat in Hammersmith, and perhaps you don't realise what kind of woman 'Janey' really is?"

"I've heard Miss Rossiter talk of her."

"It's common report that she is Barlow's mistress—one of them, I ought to say, for he has several, and it's hardly the place for Cathy. This Greenaway woman works up the wives and the female population, and gets them to back their men."

Lorrimer stood and looked at Otho, frowning and irritated.

"Does she know of this business between Barlow and her friend?"

Otho stirred his coffee and nodded.

"Oh, yes, Janey, whatever her other faults may be, is quite honest; and Cathy accepted the situation. When I spoke to her, as best I could, she only reminded me that she and Aunt Amy were dining that night with Veronica Damer, and that there was no real difference between Veronica and Hubert Ogilvie, and Barlow and Janey, except that Veronica and Hubert told lies and the others did not. You *can't* get her to see things sensibly. She retorts at once out of the Bible or throws a Society scandal at you. . . ."

He made a desperate gesture with his hands.

"And they have worked on her feelings and induced her to go and help them? It's simply damnable and ought to be stopped."

"Oh, 'ought to be stopped,' of course it ought. But who is to stop it?" Otho's voice was irritable and cross. "Twyford is away, though I believe that Aunt Amy has written to him, and even if he were here I don't fancy he could do much."

There was a silence between the two men, and Lorrimer lighted a cigar. He was wondering if he could venture to suggest that he might make an attempt on his own account.

"If she goes there, it's always possible," Otho went on, "that Danielli may persuade her to live with him. Shocking, of course," he looked at Lorrimer's horrified face, "but they discount matrimonial relationships. Until the divorce laws are made equal, and taxation separate, they won't any of them marry, so I'm told, and I suppose that Danielli would keep to his principles. The danger is that he hypnotises the girl."

"But it *must* be prevented." Lorrimer could think of nothing else to say.

"Agreed, man, agreed." Otho was losing his temper a little. "But *how?* Is there any argument you can think of that is likely to be of use? If there is, for God's sake, come and argue. She doesn't go until to-morrow."

"Certainly I will try," Lorrimer said slowly. He was perfectly sure that Cathy ought to be rescued out of her madness, but he was far from certain that he knew what to say.

"One great point in your favour," Otho said, having thought for a minute, "is that she doesn't suspect you. I'll be quite frank, Lorrimer, so that you may know how you stand. You see——" he paused a little awkwardly.

"Go on," Lorrimer said bluntly; "don't be in the least squeamish about my feelings, if that's the trouble."

"Well, Aunt Amy likes you very much, but she is one of that ridiculous group called 'the old school.' She places a lot of weight upon having known people's grandfathers. As she didn't happen to have heard of yours, she regards you rather as a mushroom. You represent the pushful, successful man from nowhere. . . . You're sure you don't mind?"

Lorrimer was conscious of a cold intensity of dislike towards Lady Carstairs welling up in his heart, but he assured Otho that he was not in the least ruffled by what he said.

"All this is hugely in your favour with Cathy. She can't accuse you of belonging to the ring, and being one of the people who forgive everything that happens in their own set—the idle, greedy rich. Cathy scraps the Progressive Party, it's true, because of Danielli, who loathes them, but at heart she believes altogether in you."

Lorrimer sat down and looked a little less affronted in his dignity.

"Does she," he looked away from Otho, "does she *like* the brute? I mean, do you really fancy that she is going to give herself away over him?"

Otho got up and began to look at the sporting prints of the moonlight riders which Monica had caused to be hung around the walls.

"How can one know what a woman thinks? Cathy has never loved anyone. She loves everybody. She thinks Danielli is a kind of prophet; he influences her, and it may lead on to surrender."

Colonel Lorrimer coughed, and sat back in his chair. He had leapt to a sudden resolve, so wild and so tremendous that it staggered him by its weight. He would fight Danielli, the strike leader, and he intended to use any means which lay at his disposal to conquer him. The main thing was to save Cathy before her reputation suffered, and to do this there was a struggle ahead of him. He rubbed his hands together, for they were cold, and he glanced at the letters on the table.

"I'll do my best," he said, and there was a ring of assurance in his voice. "All Miss Rossiter wants is to be actively interested in living reforms."

Otho laughed and got up to go. He was amused, and he took no trouble to hide his amusement.

"Don't try any electioneering touch with Cathy," he said warningly. "She has a most unfortunate sense of humour, even though she is able to swallow Danielli and all his gods." He took up his hat which he had thrown on a chair. "Where is Dr. Henstock? She might be able to innoculate Cathy with something that would kill the germ. I don't think they meet very often now."

"Dr. Henstock is fearfully overworked," Lorrimer said guardedly; "she would, I know, do anything in the world for Miss Rossiter."

"When they hadn't the vote, it kept them amused," Otho said, from the door. "What a pity they ever got it."

Lorrimer laughed, his throaty laugh, and agreed. Women should be kept in their right place, and their right place was "the home." He decided to go and see Cathy late that afternoon, and his nerves tingled at the prospect.

Cathy had had a visit from Lilian Hinton, and as she was now married to Anthony, Lady Carstairs made no formal objection to her coming to the house. She said that "bygones should be bygones," and even greeted Lilian almost as though nothing very unusual had happened since they last met. When the divorce proceedings were pending she had refused to know her. At the time when her adherence might possibly have been of some help to Lilian, she had turned away her face, and only when the second marriage was an accomplished fact could she be brought to mention her name; but when they met, Lilian having come to see Cathy, Lady Carstairs accepted her with a kind of subtle lowering of the temperature; not enough to induce a wintry frost, but sufficient to make itself felt.

During tea Lady Carstairs had remained present, and when Lilian, who was looking unusually striking, began to ask Cathy what her plans were, she knew at once that Lady Carstairs was metaphorically on the rack.

"My plans?" Cathy leaned back, and reviewed the room with a slow smile. "I feel that it's rather hard on Aunt Amy, Lil, but you must know, I suppose?"

Lilian glanced at Aunt Amy's face. It was perfectly composed, but there was ice in it; and, laughing inwardly, she shook her head, and said that she was not going to let Cathy off.

"I am going to live in Engine Road, Hammersmith," Cathy said.

"Hammersmith?" Lilian said the word incredulously, and Lady Carstairs only raised her eyebrows slightly.

"A friend of mine, Janey Greenaway, has a flat there. You must meet Janey, Lil, she is a gorgeous person."

"A little more tea, Lilian?" Lady Carstairs asked politely, and Lilian accepted this peace offering. It was the first time Aunt Amy had called her by her Christian name, until then.

"Well, go on, Cath. A woman called Janey Greenaway——" She broke off. "Not the rather celebrated Mrs. Greenaway, 'The People's Jane'?"

"Yes, that's the very one," Cathy was full of animation at once. "Some wretched journalist called her that, and, instead of being angry, she took it on, and signs it to all her letters to the Press. I love the way Janey gets back on her adversaries."

Lilian was looking at Cathy with sudden attention. Her smile had died out and her eyes were serious; a change had made itself evident in her manner, and she spoke at once.

"Oh, Cathy, *not* that crowd. I have heard all sorts of things about them. Anthony had to come in contact with Danielli over some big contract for his works, which couldn't be carried through, and couldn't be shipped, and was hopelessly hung up through the man. Anthony said that there was literally nothing bad enough for him. He is a paid agitator."

Lady Carstairs thawed suddenly, for she had found an ally where she least expected it.

"I am so glad to hear you say all this," she said, "and am glad to think that your husband agrees with me."

"But, Lil," Cathy said quickly, "you don't know the conditions. If you will come down with me and see the state of affairs along Labury Road, you will change all those views. I have been working down there, trying to help the women and children."

"Working at what?" Lilian asked. "Not helping them to stand out over this ridiculous demand for a six-hour day? Cathy, don't be so blind. Anthony is one of the most liberal employers in the Protectorate, and he is starting works over here now; but he says that, on the conditions which Danielli demands, there would be no profits and no earthly security. All that will be done is, that the workmen will be left, a hopeless rabble of unemployed, with half the factories in England closed down for good."

"But look at what they had," Cathy flushed slightly; "they were living on a starvation wage, they were housed worse than pigs, for you must house pigs decently, and the owners are able to live in comfort, and can 'loll,' as dear old Granny used to say."

Cathy was obviously hurt and disappointed by the attitude of her friend. Lilian had dared the conventions grandly, but she was wonderfully narrow when it came to a question of strikes.

Lady Carstairs got up; she had feared that Lilian's visit would only turn out to be a further disaster, for she felt that Lilian, having come out on the wrong side of the Divorce Courts, as it were, would certainly be a red Republican, anxious to see the Constitution overthrown, and an open admirer of Danielli, who had such deplorable views upon marriage. Now it seemed that, whatever her faults might be, Lilian was to be trusted, and even Anthony, her partner in crime, held all the right views. They were married, and Robert was, after all, rather an unsatisfactory husband . . . perhaps she had been a little over-strict, though she could not abate a jot of her conviction that Lilian should have remained with Robert. All these thoughts floated through her mind, as she explained that she had to attend a meeting of Church workers.

"We are out of the fashion," she said, "and I know that none of Cathy's friends approve of us, but I dare say we shall still survive, even after the revolution."

She kissed Lilian quite affectionately, and asked her to come again, adding, with a sigh of mental effort, that she must bring Mr. Hinton.

"Dear Aunt Amy, she is so cross just now," Cathy said when the door had closed. "After all, Lil, you also do not approve, but what in the world do you take exception to? If I said I was going to New York, no one would be even surprised, so it's not the fact of my going away for a month. If I said I wanted to become a Grey Lady, and undertake good works in the slums, you might be astonished, but you couldn't object. I am not going to spout on a platform, I'm not going to scrub floors; I'm merely going to do odd jobs, and see where I can be of real use to a whole lot of tragic people who are putting up a splendid fight. Even if you don't agree with them, you might admit that much."

Lilian considered her reply; she was perfectly sure of what she felt and thought.

"I don't like common people out of their place," she said firmly. "The People's Jane is a vulgarian, and she can't help jarring on you. Then there is the story about her and Barlow. Don't fancy that I am sitting up and judging her, but it's rather squalid."

"Because they live in Hammersmith?"

"Yes, I expect that adds to it. Danielli is not to be trusted, and you, Cath, *you* to be in the thick of that group. Do show some sense of the general fitness of things."

Cathy got up and walked to the fire and stood, leaning her arm on the mantelpiece, looking down at the blaze.

"I can't tell you how little all you say affects me," she replied. "Perhaps you remember how little you cared yourself for what people said when you went out to war. In my case the question isn't personal, it merely arises through the fact that I hold unpopular views. You have never seen Danielli, never spoken to Janey, and it's so unlike you to be unjust."

Lilian looked down, and again her distress became evident.

"I so hate to think of you exiled like that. It's a class war, Cathy, and you belong to us. Even the people you befriend won't understand you, and they will turn against you."

"If one were to mind what people said, one wouldn't get up in the morning," Cathy said impatiently. "Surely, Lil, you of all people——"

"Oh, I know I'm disappointing you, I know you think me a Pharisee, because I criticise the Greenaway *ménage*. Cathy, you are taking a step which is positively dangerous."

Cathy made a hopeless gesture with her hands.

"Anyone else to say these things—but *you,* Lil. I can't believe my ears."

Lilian got up and put her arm through Cathy's.

"I know that you think me a broken reed," she said gently, "but, Cath, I only broke a social convention. You are out to join in with people who have nothing to do with your life, and besides, this Danielli is such a cad."

Cathy swept round suddenly and looked at her friend.

"What are you afraid of?" she asked. "That I shall live with Danielli? Affront my little world to screaming point?"

She held Lilian's hands in hers, and they looked very steadfastly in each other's eyes, trying to read into the hidden thoughts behind their silence; and it was upon this picture that Twyford looked, as he opened the door, standing watching the two women.

Twyford was up from the country, and had come in a hurry. He was wearing a disgraceful old shooting coat which had gone at the elbows, and he brought in with him a feeling of forgotten things. He was pleased to see Lilian, and had been her faithful friend when winds were contrary. No one dared to discuss his friends with him, and this in itself is a high compliment.

Lilian turned to Twyford. She felt that there was something hopeful in his arrival and that she could leave with a feeling of satisfaction. One always came back to Twyford, insensibly, partly because he never changed.

He saw her to the door, and when he went back to the drawing-room Twyford found Cathy sitting on the white rug in front of the fire, for, though it was April, the weather was cold and unforgiving. The room was full of flowers, and the faint scent of mimosa floated in the air like a beautiful thought.

She was looking a little depressed and did not smile at him.

"I suppose, as you've come in that disgraceful old coat, that Aunt Amy sent you an S.O.S., and you are here to prevent my going to Hammersmith, if you can." Twyford was one of the only people towards whom Cathy was frequently irritable and unreasonable. "You are all making such a ridiculous fuss. Why, when Lilian decided to go off with Anthony, there was hardly more chatter."

"Anyhow, I didn't chatter," he sat down near her; "give me credit for that. I never believe in interference, and I'm only here to find out why you want to go."

"Because I want to do something worth while."

"And it's got to be done down in Labury Road? Isn't there anywhere else, Cathy?"

"No, there isn't," she said truculently.

"What's wrong with us all?" Twyford asked, and then the flood gates opened, and Cathy began to quote Danielli.

She gave him no chance to speak, nor did he attempt to interrupt her. Nowhere in all her world could Cathy discover simplicity and honest faith. The people had decided to cast out the false gods, and the people were right. You could not compromise.

Twyford looked at the fire, and it was some time before he spoke.

"I don't think you give traditions much of a chance, Cathy," he said, "and I'm not going to wrestle with you in argument. You're far better at that kind of game than I am. You say, 'let the people rule,' and I suppose they are going to have a shot at it. I hope they enjoy the job."

Cathy smiled suddenly. Twyford was really amusing when he talked on abstract propositions.

"Still, there's one bad hole in your argument," he went on. "Danielli, if he became President of the British Republic, would live in a big house and have a car; he simply couldn't help himself. I'm not blaming him; only it's a bit thick that he should object to me because I could own a car—which I don't." It was a long speech for Twyford, but he had not entirely concluded what he had to say. "To get your Republic on its legs there's a lot of shooting to be done first, and, if you had been in Russia, as I was when the ball started, you'd wonder if it was worth it."

"It was worth it to France, and surely America is justified of her War of Independence?"

Twyford shrugged his shoulders. She hated the idea of physical cruelty, and, though he said so very little, she felt that he was thinking of many things which he had seen, and his thought touched her with a queer sense of apprehension; but Twyford was no diplomatist, and he did not know his advantage over her. She was just Cathy to him, Cathy, who was behaving like a naughty child who has picked up a bomb as a plaything and refuses to hand it over to the bidding of authority. He leant forward, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"I am all that you most object to," he said; "that is, in theory. I was a dunce at Eton, and I didn't take my degree at Oxford, but I can be trusted, Cathy, and I think it's time you said that you would marry me."

Cathy recoiled from him and sprang to her feet. He had made a hopeless blunder and he knew it directly it was irrevocable, but spoken words cannot be recalled.

"I shall make one alteration in my plans," she said; "instead of leaving to-morrow, I shall go at once," and, without waiting to hear what he had to say, she left the room.

At six o'clock Colonel Lorrimer presented himself at Lady Carstairs' house and asked for Miss Rossiter, only to receive the information that she had gone away, and that her address was 16, Engine Street, Hammersmith. As he stood at the door, he saw Twyford cross the hall, but he took no notice of Lorrimer, though he must have seen him. So Twyford had had an innings and failed. He turned away stiffly and walked along the square by the railings of the garden.

CHAPTER X

The flat in Engine Road was at the top of a gaunt house, with interminable flights of stairs leading to the eyrie of Janey Greenaway. All sorts and conditions of men and women lived on the other landings, and the atmosphere of the whole place was that of disorder. Janey, at the top, escaped from a greater part of the noise, and was sole possessor of the whole landing. Her sitting-room was in the centre, and two small bedrooms opened off it; opposite to the door of the sitting-room, and across the landing, was Barlow's lair, where he collected piles of daily papers and answered an enormous correspondence. There was a tiny kitchen at the furthest end of the landing, and a bathroom, which was not often used, and in which both taps ran relentlessly cold and chill.

The sitting-room overlooked the tops of a group of weary trees, and gave a distant view of the river. The windows were thick with dust, but the interior of the room was comparatively tidy, for Janey liked to see things in their right places. On the mantelpiece there were a number of photographs of various members of the group, and the walls were adorned with posters and manifestoes instead of pictures. The writing-table was piled up with papers, and the carpet was shabby and dull from the wear and tear of the passing of many feet. Janey's taste was not æsthetic, and her furniture was solid rather than beautiful, but the main disadvantage of the flat lay in the fact that it insisted upon close quarters. Pack people sufficiently tight, and unless they are very unusual, it makes for irritation. You could say anything you liked in Janey's flat, and express the most extreme opinions without reserve. Everything was open to discussion, and Janey herself invited debate. She had not expected Cathy the evening she arrived, but it made no difference.

Janey was going out and did not expect to be back until the small hours, and went her untrammelled way cheerfully.

To Cathy, the experience was sufficiently new to be interesting. She was interested in her tiny box of a room, with a poster over her bed, on which the words stared at her blackly in capitals, "British Socialist Party. Hands off Russia," and another over the wash-hand-stand, "Free the Prisoners. Work for the release of 1,800 political prisoners." On every side she was exhorted to be up and doing, and she blamed herself for thinking how hard it would be to contain her possessions in one small chest of drawers. From down below perpetual sounds came up to her and reminded her that she was in the heart of life. Not shut away into the seclusion and privacy of her aunt's house any longer, but sheer in the whirlpool itself.

She was tired and she certainly missed the ordered comfort of Aunt Amy's house, but her heart was light and she sang to herself as she washed up the plates in the pantry sink.

When Cathy had nearly finished washing up, she heard a footstep in the kitchen, and Barlow stood in the door looking at her. He took off his hat and smiled, and Cathy responded at once. She did not like Barlow, but felt that she must manage to swallow him, both for Janey's sake and because he was a comrade in the world's adventure.

"Too late to be of use," he said, "but in time to talk. I have a free hour. Janey gone out?"

Cathy replied that Mrs. Greenaway was not likely to be in before midnight, and she followed him, as he walked with hunched shoulders to the sitting-room and turned on the gas fire and the strong incandescent light over the table. She never allowed herself to think very much of Janey's romance; it seemed out of place, and, as romances go, there was so very little illusion about it. They seemed like wild birds rocking upon an upper branch in a storm, and with a bare, bleak world around them. Barlow was often rude and abrupt to Janey, and there were times when Mrs. Greenaway appeared to be on edge and very irritable towards Barlow, but it never occurred to Cathy to doubt the high principles or the sincerity of either. Barlow's spare bent figure and look of aged youth was painful in a way. He had done six months in jail and his face had a set, scraped look. His hair was cropped to the skin, and his "Pan-like effect" made all the rest of him bizarre and alarming.

For a little while Barlow talked of the strike, laughing to himself and rubbing his chin with his knuckles. He had adopted a violence of speech, the more to repudiate his training, and Cathy felt odd thrills of astonishment as he used the language of the working man. He sat huddled deep in the most comfortable chair, with his legs crossed and his knees up to his chin, and all the time he watched her with his half-mystic, half-malevolent eyes.

"I'm glad you've come," he said," it will do you a heap of good. The first time I saw you you were wearing a hat, rather a neat kind of hat, but it hid your hair."

Cathy looked at him, and then looked away quickly. She became certain that she did not care for Major Barlow.

"You are wonderfully beautiful," he said at last; "far too beautiful, because you make us all think of you most for that. Danielli knows it." He laughed again and hugged himself. "I loved you at once."

Cathy got up and looked towards the door of her room. If Barlow intended to be offensive she had a remedy, she could go to bed. But she had reckoned without full knowledge of the actual conditions of Janey's flat, and Barlow, who saw what she intended to do, spoke quickly.

"The door doesn't shut, so if you do go to bed it doesn't cut communications. Sit down and talk. What are you frightened of? I'm not the first man, married or single, who has said he loved you, not by dozens. Don't play the prude."

Cathy subsided into her chair. Here was a dilemma, and it must be met sensibly. After all, there was no use in saying, "Unhand me, villain." She had wanted free speech, and if it was more than she had bargained for, she still had no real right to complain. The worst of it was that she did not know what to do. Her class barriers were a fearful disadvantage, for any girl of the people would have been able to settle Barlow inside five minutes.

"I think you're talking nonsense," she said, trying not to speak frigidly, in case he should laugh at her.

"I wasn't thinking of you," he replied, "only of myself. I've loved a lot of women. Before I took up with Janey I was living with Esmé Jacobs, a dark little Jew girl."

He lighted an American cigarette and looked reflectively at the narrow spiral of smoke.

"It doesn't interest me in the least," Cathy said, flushing to the roots of her hair, "and besides, I consider that if you love anyone you ought to have the common decency to be faithful."

"Oh, that's what you think, is it?" He appeared neither nettled nor concerned, merely astonished. "I should have thought that you might have discovered that inspiration requires change." He laughed again, his odd, chuckling laugh, and went on. "Since first I saw you I have felt that you could be of great help to me, but of course you'd have to live with me. You can't know a woman at all unless you have lived with her."

"And do you propose that I shall be one of your harem, or what is your idea?" Cathy felt her temper rising wildly.

"There, there," he said, and he patted her arm. "I constantly forget that you aren't half educated. If you agree, and you probably will in time, you could trust me implicitly."

Cathy looked around her in dismay. Would Janey never come in, would no one come? She felt absurdly frightened of Barlow, and she began to remember that one read things in the daily papers about what men sometimes did. She reminded herself that Barlow was originally from her own world, and she gathered courage again.

"Surely, Major Barlow," she said, "you still remember how to treat women decently? I hate to take you at your own word."

"Why not?" He leaned forward, gaunt and large, and put his thin face close to hers. "I have been a convict, and

I have worked as a day labourer. I've got away from the flim-flams, Cathy, and your voice is sweet—ah, sweet."

He took hold of her hand and began to kiss her wrist with dry, hungry kisses.

Forcing herself free from him, she stood against the table. Barlow did not get up, he only watched her with the same curiously concentrated interest.

"You *are* beautiful," he said again, with great sincerity, "and I suppose I've been forcing the pace. Still, you will have to forgive me, you aren't half educated, and you stifle every natural impulse because you've been shackled by silly traditions. Let yourself be the woman God meant you to be."

What Cathy would have said she did not know. She was only aware of footsteps on the bare boards of the passage. Someone was coming to the rescue, and, whoever it was, she was more than thankful to him. She adjusted her looks, with the life-long habit of hiding a scene, and when he heard a knock on the door, Barlow sank back and began to nurse his knees again. He, too, looked as though nothing the least unusual had occurred.

"Come in," Cathy said, and her voice sounded steady and normal. She even wondered at herself and her own calm.

There was a pause before the door opened, and she had crossed the room, fearing that whoever it was who knocked might go away, and opening the door, found herself face to face with Colonel Lorrimer.

Lorrimer had known Cathy pleased to see him on many occasions; he had also known occasions when she hardly realised that he was there at all, but just when he dreaded that she might meet him with anger, he saw her whole face break into joyful recognition.

"You," she said, "you, Colonel Lorrimer. I am glad to see you."

She brought him in and introduced him to Barlow, who did not get up but nodded over his shoulder, and Lorrimer took off his gloves and looked around him. Barlow noted his look and hated him for it.

The position was intensely difficult, and Barlow did nothing to lessen the tension, nor did he make the least effort to leave them together, even though Lorrimer remarked pointedly that he had a message from Lady Carstairs. The message was an invention of his own. He had not put on evening dress, but wore a dark suit, and his prosperity clashed and warred with the lean figure of Barlow, heaped and untidy and not even particularly clean.

"Are you stayin' here long?" he asked, looking at Cathy with his dull eyes. "I only heard to-day that you thought of taking a kind of holiday, what?"

"Oh, yes, I am having a holiday." Cathy laughed. "I wish you would come and help us; there is a great deal to do."

"Not in your line," Barlow remarked from behind an evening paper which he had produced from his pocket.

"And why not in my line?" Lorrimer's tone was deliberately provocative.

"I'd better not say." Barlow laid the paper over his knees and laughed. "Already I have affronted Cathy Rossiter by telling her the truth, and I can't suppose that you would care for it any more than she did."

Lorrimer turned his back upon Barlow and began to talk to Cathy in a slightly lowered voice.

"I'm awfully sorry you have to be away just now," he said, "for my own sake. I'm standing for Kingslade and am full of all sorts of ideas." He heard Barlow's stifled sound of mockery. "I want to get hold of a whole heap of information that I can't come by. Jesson has allowed me an open programme, and I can work along the widest lines."

"God! How long are you all going to talk that kind of bilge?" Barlow said from his chair. "Until the millennium, I suppose? Good houses, good wages, cheap food. You and your lot have been shoving that bloody clap-trap down the neck of the working man since Cain killed Abel."

"I felt that you would be able to help me tremendously," Lorrimer said, entirely disregarding the interruption, "only I suppose I'm too late. I expect that Monica will lend a hand, she is very dependable."

"Dear old Mug. I haven't seen her for ages." Cathy's voice sounded regretful, and she looked at Lorrimer piteously. She saw, ahead of her, a month of torture. Barlow always in the flat, and, indeed, there by right of part ownership, and Janey gradually awakening into shrewish jealousy. She had caught a fleeting glimpse of the human side of Janey one night when Barlow had taken a delegate from the Women's Bus Conductors' Union home, after a meeting where she had spoken with fiery eloquence; her uniform and her piquante face making ample amends for her cockney voice and an absence of aspirates. Janey had let go for about five minutes, and Cathy always strove to forget the revelation. Women of all classes were the same in this respect, she had told herself, only that Janey was honest enough to say what she thought. The idea of the same honesty being brought into play in her own case was disquieting and hopelessly awkward. Barlow cared nothing for anyone's feelings, and he had certainly marked her for his own. Lorrimer had not even hinted at her giving up her work; he did not seem to expect it. All that appeared was that he was intensely sorry to miss her help, and Monica would do very well instead. The flat grew close and airless, and Cathy remembered, with shrinkings of the soul, that Janey went away quite often to stump the manufacturing towns, and, with Janey away, she would be all alone with Barlow. If he desired to engineer it, he could arrange for Janey to go and carry the fiery cross through rural England, and have her at his mercy, or put her in the position of one who would go back to her people feeling that she had fought for nothing—besides, there was Danielli, and he wanted her.

Lorrimer had run rather short of conversation, but he showed no sign of moving, and Cathy prayed that he would stay. She offered him tea, for it was the only thing there was to offer, and Barlow drank it strong and black at all hours.

"So Mug will take a holiday and go electioneering," she said, with an effort at gaiety. "I shall make her tell me all about it."

Her hands trembled a little and she looked, so Lorrimer felt, unprotected and quite ridiculously out of place. In his eyes Barlow appeared like a gargoyle, sticking out his long neck and following her with his passionate look. It was hateful, damnable, quite intolerable, and somehow or other it must be ended at once. He had left his car in Hammersmith Broadway, and he wanted to bring her away in it immediately. He also desired to break Barlow's neck and throw him down the dirty staircase, but he felt that he must walk warily, and that all he dared do to show his feelings was to continue in his remote attitude, ignoring Barlow so far as he was able. He looked at his teacup and glanced again around the room, with its wild posters decorating the walls, and the cold, ungracious light of the gas making even Cathy look hard of outline and a little angular, because of the deep shadows it threw. To see her in such a place was simply tragic, and to think of her remaining on in the company of a man who talked like a navvy was out of the question.

"When does Mrs. Greenaway usually—er—toddle home?" he asked, trying to play up to Cathy's effort at lightness.

"Any old hour," Barlow replied. "She may not come back to-night."

"Oh," replied Lorrimer stiffly, and he crumbled a soft biscuit.

"You couldn't spare me an hour or two to-morrow?" he said tentatively, "or is all your day quite full? If you could, I can run you and Monica down with me in the car, and still get you back in plenty of time for stiffenin' the strike."

Try as he would, his voice betrayed animosity, but Cathy did not resent it.

"Certainly," she said, "it's quite easy. I am really free all the early part of the day."

She glanced at Barlow with a quick look of apprehension, and Lorrimer saw that already she was a little afraid of him, and he cursed him again.

"Of course, I don't know that I shall be returned. It's likely to be a stiff fight. There's Colebrook, a Labour Candidate, and possibly Elmsford, in the Conservative interest, only he may stand down. I'm a kind of experiment——"

"Of course you'll get in," Cathy said enthusiastically.

"Yes, of course," added Barlow. "Votes at, say, eight and sixpence a head, and a war-cry of 'Out with the Hun, and England for the English.' Accept my congratulations in advance."

Lorrimer glanced at his watch. It was nearly midnight, and his chauffeur would be in a foul temper at the long delay, but he had grown to a feeling of independence towards chauffeurs since his early days, and if the man showed temper he would sack him. Certainly he would not apologise.

"It's getting late," he said, and looked at Cathy, waiting for her to tell him what she wished him to do.

She was abstracted and distressed, and she plunged into a fresh conversation, though she looked dreadfully tired and weary, and obviously should have been in bed. Was she afraid of Barlow, he wondered? He had a beastly reputation where women were concerned, and Lorrimer sat on.

"To-morrow, then, at eleven," he said; "that's fixed."

And a few minutes later Janey Greenaway came in and sat down at the table. She wanted tea, quantities of tea; and, feeling that Cathy was now protected from having to be alone with Barlow, Colonel Lorrimer took his departure, and Cathy withdrew to her bedroom.

As she lay awake, the door ajar because it wouldn't shut, she heard Janey's clear, incisive tones, and Barlow's low mumble continuing interminably. Cathy hadn't made her bed very well, but she was too weary to notice that, and at last she fell asleep.

In the morning Janey set her to clear away the debris of the over-night meal and lay the table. Cathy had a little hot water from the kettle in which to wash, and she felt out of sorts and still sleepy. Janey was just as full of energy and vitality as ever, and she smoked her "gaspers" while she cooked at the gas stove with untroubled indifference.

It was during breakfast that she announced to Cathy that she might have to go to Manchester. There was urgent need of workers among the hands at a large cotten factory, who had accepted terms which clashed with Danielli's views, and they must be brought into line.

"You'll be all right here," she said. "George won't be in the way, and you can go to the Progress Club if you feel dull."

Cathy fiddled with her toast and looked at Janey, who evidently guessed nothing as to how matters now stood between her and Major Barlow.

"I think I can't," she said doubtfully. "Don't regard me as a fool, Janey dear, but I'd far rather leave, and come back to you when your Manchester trip is over. I'm not a bit used to being alone and running a man, as it were." She smiled a perplexed little smile. "I see how idiotic I look, but I want your help, Janey. Without you I fizzle out."

Mrs. Greenaway looked at her with her sharp, black eyes.

"You ought to learn independence," she said firmly. "Everyone should be independent. It is the fault of your wretched upbringing, Cathy. I don't mind what I eat, or where I sleep. You are at the mercy of the hot bath habit and a special bed. I don't *blame* you, I only say that it's time you conquered it."

"I am going to Kingslade this morning," Cathy explained. "Colonel Lorrimer, the man who was here last night, came to ask me to go down with him and an old friend, Monica Henstock; he is standing for the election there, as a Progressive."

"Progressives!" Janey's scorn was limitless. "They are about as progressive as a four-wheeler. If there is any progress about them it works backwards. Surely you don't mean to show on their side? If you do, Cathy, I warn you that Danielli won't like it. We aren't out to mix with anyone else; what we stand for is the International idea, and the Progressives, if they have an idea, are all jingoes; in other words, they intend to keep up a huge army and all the class barriers firm."

"Surely I am hardly of sufficient importance," Cathy said. "No, Janey, I couldn't offer up my liberty of action. I can do very little either for Danielli or for Colonel Lorrimer, but I feel that it *is* of real use to combine for the best points in the Progressive programme."

"Very well," Janey got up and began to collect the plates, "do as you like about it. I only tell you that you can't serve God and mammon. You are too fond of compromise, Cathy, and it will be the ruin of your life before you have finished."

Cathy assented, but she made no offer to change her plans, and, with a guilty rising of her spirits, she packed her bag and left it ready, while she joined Janey again, and Barlow came in. He looked more gaunt than ever, and his queer, deep-set eyes were mocking and angry.

"So you have decided to cut and run?" he asked rudely.

"I'm coming back when Janey's stunt is over."

Barlow laughed, and his laugh was not pleasant.

"From the first," he said, "I guessed you'd have cold feet. You are flesh and bone of the ruling class, and there's nothing so vulgar as guts in your make-up."

"Don't be a beast, George," Janey flared up in defence of her friend.

"Miss Rossiter is one of those people who can only swallow the truth in homœopathic doses," he said, sitting down to the one place left at the table and helping himself to tea. "I entirely agree that she is right to leave us, but I want her to think honestly."

Cathy felt her ears tingling, and she hated Barlow as he sat there, unshaved and indifferent.

"Very well," she said suddenly, "if we are going to abuse each other, my chief reason for going away is that I won't remain here with you."

"That's better," he said, nodding at her. "I like the sound of that. You're learning a little."

"Let her do what she likes," said Janey, who did not appear to care very much.

She was fond of Cathy, but she realised that an extra person in the flat was likely to make trouble, and she felt sure that Barlow was attracted by the magic of her friend. She had asked her to come there because Danielli said that she might be useful, but even Danielli had his doubts.

"Your fat friend will get in for Kingslade. It is a rotten place, servile and cringing," Barlow went on. "The people have been taught by the parson to 'order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters,' and they will vote as they are told to, or those who profess scruples will make their eight and sixpence." He was eating with a careless, rapid violence, and drinking noisily.

He took no more notice of her, and began to read *The Call,* while he stirred his tea, slopping it over into the saucer; nor did he speak to her again when she had put on her hat and came back to the room carrying her suit-case. He sat there unconcerned, and absorbed in his paper, until a chauffeur in a smart livery came up the staircase and stood in the doorway. His orders were, he said, to call for Miss Rossiter and then return to Colonel Lorrimer's flat, where he and Dr. Henstock would be waiting. Barlow glanced up at the servant and gave his odd, grinning smile.

"By gosh," he said; "I thought that you were a thing of the past."

The chauffeur glanced at Cathy and took up her suit-case. Janey had gone and the situation appeared to puzzle him.

"I'm not above doing honest work," he said truculently, "if that's what you mean."

Cathy looked at Barlow. If she was ever really to return to this strange world, she ought to try and part with him in a more or less friendly spirit.

"Good-bye," she said, softening, as was her wont.

"Oh, run along," he said brutally; "soft sawder is no use to me. But one of these days, when you do really wake up, we may meet again."

He began to read his paper, and Cathy left him, and sped down the staircase to where the large car was attracting a great deal of attention in the street.

She sat in the car, her eyes on a bunch of expensive carnations set in a cut-glass vase over a looking-glass, and tears came into her eyes. She was miserably disappointed in herself, and she felt that every accusation which Barlow had thrown at her was intrinsically true. She had not got the grit of Janey, or the firm steadfastness of Monica; she saw that Danielli was right; but personal discomfort and the attentions of Barlow, which she should be able to tackle, had discouraged her at the outset. She had not stood the test, and she was discredited in her own eyes.

The drive to Kingslade was delightful, and the village looked as though it had been designed by an artist. Pointed roofs and gabled houses, a market square surrounded by trees in their spring green; an old Cathedral, drowsy and mellowed by time, and a Close, where the shadows lay over a stretch of old turf, and, at the end of the wide street, the imposing wrought-iron gates of Kingslade Park. A neat old woman came out and curtsied to them as she opened the gates, and both Monica and Cathy exclaimed at the beauty of the view within. Kingslade Park was a perfect house, standing on a rise over a clear lake, wooded on one side, and the outline of tower and turret stood up against the stainless blue of the sky. It would be easy, so Cathy thought, to keep oneself unspotted from the world in such an environment, and she walked through the house, looking at room after room, entranced by the spirit of the place. She had come there direct from Engine Road, and she felt that it represented shelter and peace.

While he showed them round the house, and, later on, in the wonderful gardens, Lorrimer talked of his plans. He wanted "betterment," the word cropped up perpetually, and he leaned upon it heavily. Conditions in the village were by no means as admirable as they appeared. There was a great deal to be done. He wanted to set up a technical school, and he wanted—there was no end to what he wanted. Life was good, life was beautiful, and here in the village there was scope enough and to spare. They all seemed to be in perfect accord and unison, and after lunch Lorrimer discovered that the lodge-keeper's daughter was down with a sore throat. Monica became professional at once, and it was suggested that she should be run down in the car to have a look at the patient.

When she had gone and they were alone, Lorrimer took Cathy into the library. She was unusually silent, and he stood a little way off watching her.

"I'm glad you like it all," he said slowly.

"Like it? It's a heavenly place. And then, you are going to do so much."

Cathy sat down at the writing-table, and suddenly and without warning, she began to cry.

"I feel such a failure," she said; "all my fine talk, and the way I have bullied Aunt Amy and all of them. . . . Janey saw that I was no real use, and I feel as if I had sat down in a puddle."

Lorrimer advanced towards her. How long would Monica be absent, he wondered. He should have given the chauffeur an injunction to delay, only that it would hardly have been in keeping with his dignity.

"It was only through you, and the thought of you," he said, "that I have begun to do anything. I may do something alone, but if—yes, if——" he bent over her and put his hands on her shoulders.

She raised her face and looked up at him, listening, and not angry.

"I am a nobody," he said, "and I hardly dare to suggest it to you, but, with you as my wife, all my dreams would come true."

Cathy propped her chin on her folded hands. She was thinking, and he knew that it meant he had lost nothing anyhow, and might even have gained his heart's desire.

"You want me to marry you?" she said. "But I don't think I love you. I love your ideals and all you are going to do, but the real you I know so little."

Lorrimer stood silent, with bent head, and Cathy recalled the Batten incident, and, somehow, as she again remembered Barlow, she made up her mind at once.

"I will marry you," she said, and she put her hands in his.

"Perhaps we had better not tell Monica until your people know," he said, as the sound of the car coming up the avenue warned them of her return.

In his heart he was well aware that there was a bad time ahead for Monica. He had been with her a great deal of late, and he had grown close to her. That did not matter now, because Cathy was his own, but it would be a pity if

Monica were to be on edge and angry during the drive back. He owed it to her to break the news softly, and surely the best way to do this is to write.

"I'd have that hall coloured differently," Monica said, as they took a last look round. "A few palms will be a great improvement."

CHAPTER XI

Lady Carstairs' joy at the swift return of the Prodigal was unbounded. She was astounded and delighted at once, and when Cathy went to her room and left her aunt with Lorrimer, she said again and again, "How *did* you persuade her? It is the last thing I expected."

Lorrimer, intensely self-conscious and inwardly bursting with pride, spoke humbly, and inferred that he had thought it best to go to Hammersmith the night before, "in case she wasn't having a good time."

"I am sure you did something *very* clever," Lady Carstairs repeated at intervals, "and I need not say how grateful I am."

Then the moment for disclosure arrived, and Lorrimer's throat grew dry. It was difficult to get over the intangible ledge which divided him from Cathy's aunt. She had been saying "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," and he had to inform her that he was about to become her nephew-in-law.

"We went to Kingslade," he said as an opening.

"A charming place. I felt so deeply for Sandown when it had to be sold. It seemed as though yet another landmark had been swept away. Ah well, after all their loss is your gain."

It was not exactly encouraging, but Lorrimer waded on.

"While we were there," he said abruptly, "I asked your niece to marry me, Lady Carstairs, and she has accepted me."

Lady Carstairs was silent, and her silence was terrible. She loved Cathy deeply, and she admired Twyford from her heart. To see them married was one of the hopes of her years, and though she considered Lorrimer, "a good man," she felt him almost as far beneath her as Cutler, who had been in her service for twenty years. The blow could not be disguised, and she made no attempt to disguise it.

"I wonder if Cathy has given due thought to her reply," she said, compressing her lips. "She is alarmingly impulsive, Colonel Lorrimer, and you would do well not to count upon too much. You have seen what happened yesterday. Only yesterday afternoon she was quite sure that Providence meant her to remain in Hammersmith."

"I think she meant what she said," he replied obstinately.

"You will understand," Lady Carstairs continued, "that for a long time, though there is no actual engagement, we have taken it for granted that Lord Twyford and she would marry."

"Surely Cathy herself is the best judge."

Lorrimer was getting angry, with the slow, solemn anger of a heavy man.

"Pardon me," Lady Carstairs was more and more polite; "I feel she is not; not at this moment. She is upset and over-excited. I do not hint that you took any advantage of her, please understand that, Colonel Lorrimer, but she must be given time to reflect." She got up and held out her hand, and Lorrimer found himself being dismissed. "I cannot say that I should like the marriage. Not that I think that you are to blame. You are a good man, and I fully respect you. It is as well," she coughed drily, "that you should know that I do object most definitely, and that I shall use any influence I have to show Cathy what a mistake it would all be."

Lorrimer stuck out his elbows, and talked in a special voice which he only used when he had been intensely affronted.

"Thank you," he said, with acid formality, addressing her as though she were a constituent, "I shall not count upon your support."

He might possibly have said more, only that Robert Amyas came in, and Lady Carstairs greeted him affectionately.

"Am I disturbing you?" he asked in his drawling way.

"Not in the least, Robert; Colonel Lorrimer is going," and Lady Carstairs bowed very stiffly in his direction as he left the room.

He felt he had been hounded out, and his anger was great, but he consoled himself by going to Spinks and buying a very expensive ring, which he sent by special messenger to the house in Cavendish Square.

"You look as though Lorrimer had been boring you, Aunt Amy," Robert said, sitting down in a deep chair.

He was not really related, but being so frequently at the house he had adopted Lady Carstairs as an aunt when he was still at school.

"So he has," she said. She was wondering whether she should tell Amyas of this fresh disaster. Really Cathy was becoming more and more of a problem.

"I hate the brute," Robert spoke frankly. "Can't he be got rid of?"

"He has just brought Cathy back," Lady Carstairs said faintly.

Amyas sat up, openly disquieted.

"Brought her out of Danielli's lions' den? My dear Aunt Amy, it's black magic. When I last saw Cathy she was babbling of dead people on the sideboard, and the regeneration of the slums. What argument did he use?"

"It's worse than that, Robert," Lady Carstairs said miserably, "far worse. She has come back engaged to him."

Something seemed to happen to Amyas. He altered under Aunt Amy's eyes, and his face looked very nearly strong.

"How damnable," he said, staring at the floor.

"I haven't seen Cathy yet. I fear there will be a great deal of trouble. Twyford is in London, but he isn't ever able to manage her. I will send for him, of course; he ought to know."

"Twyford is a good fellow—one wouldn't mind if it were he," Amyas said, as though answering some question he had put to himself. "Look here, Aunt Amy, I've been in love with Cathy for a long time; even before Lilian hooked it, I suppose. Of course I know that she has no use for me, and she is right; but I'm not abusing Lorrimer out of spite. I *know* the man is a sham. If he marries Cathy he will show himself sooner or later, and the worst of him is that he is a pious fraud. The kind of blighter who persuades himself that he's righteous. If Cathy marries him," he got up and stood before Lady Carstairs, "God only knows what will come out of it. I have felt this coming."

Robert was so sincere in his speech that he added a thousandfold to Lady Carstairs' sense of doom. She looked white and scared and her pale eyes were full of alarm.

"Cathy is so headstrong," she said helplessly, "so self-willed."

"She isn't in love with Lorrimer; that's one blessing," Amyas said. "She can't be; no woman could. It is, as you say, impulse, and he has taken a dog's advantage of her."

"Hush!" said Lady Carstairs quickly, and turned to the door as Cathy came in.

Cathy looked so much herself, so normal and so natural, that she felt reassured. It was not possible that she really meant to ally herself with this rich, coarse-grained man, who was neither of the people nor of her own kind.

"Has Jack gone?" she asked carelessly, holding out one finger to Robert and laughing at him as she did so. "Robert, what a face! Take it off at once."

"Colonel Lorrimer left some time ago," her aunt replied. "I see you have changed, Cathy. I think I will go and get ready for dinner. We could have it a little earlier than usual."

When her aunt had gone Cathy turned to Amyas.

"I'm going to be married, Robert," she said. "I suppose that Jack broke the awful news to Aunt Amy, and that she then passed it on to you?"

"She did tell me."

He sat down on the arm of her chair and looked at her.

"We've been friends for a long time," he said, "and it gives me a right to speak out. You've always spoken out where I am concerned."

"Speak out," Cathy said, looking up at him. "I have had a heap of plain speech lately and I'm growing used to it."

"I think this idea of yours is simply atrocious." Amyas got up and stood irresolutely between the fire-place and the chair where Cathy was sitting. "It is wrong, Cath; the kind of thing which sets one's teeth on edge. Lorrimer is an outsider; oh, I know he covers it up as best he can, but the man is a bounder."

"You aren't extraordinarily tactful," she said idly. "I should hardly describe you as a diplomatist."

"I don't want to be diplomatic. If I were, you'd know jolly well that I was humbugging you. Cut it, Cathy, end it now."

Cathy said nothing for a minute or two, and then she spoke very quietly.

"I know that I have not thought it over very much," she said, "but that doesn't matter. It came as a real inspiration. Uprightness, cleanheartedness, good faith are not so easy to find; and, Robert, when you think of your own record, aren't you a little ashamed of yourself?"

Amyas breathed hard and said nothing.

"You have a certain pride in finer class distinctions," she went on. "Of what use is it all, and what is it worth if there is neither truth nor goodness in it? If Colonel Lorrimer feels that you and I and the rest of us have an inheritance, as a birthright which money cannot buy, he is wrong, and his faith in us misleads him. You ask me to hurt him and break my word. I can't believe that you are so petty and so small-minded."

"It is not only that." Amyas collected himself quickly. "I can't really explain my reasons. They are like your own, a matter of inspiration. From the first I felt that Lorrimer was out to marry you, and that he would manage it very well. He has done so, and oh, Cathy," he came to her and caught her hands, his face strained and earnest, "I don't trust him with you. He'll do something, later on, which will bring you trouble. If it were Twyford I shouldn't talk like this, but I can't trust Lorrimer."

"It's no use arguing with you." Cathy smiled quickly and shook her head at him. "You will see how well it will work."

Amyas said nothing further, and Cutler brought in a small box on a tray which he handed to Cathy, who flushed suddenly as she looked at the address. She made no attempt to open the parcel, and, signing her name in the book, she leaned back in her chair and was lost in thought. She hardly appeared to know when Amyas left, and Lady Carstairs found her still sitting with the unopened parcel between her hands.

"I have had rather an unpleasant interview with Colonel Lorrimer," she said, when dinner was over and they were alone in the library, where they usually sat when no guests were expected. "You understand, Cathy, that I feel this new move of yours very much. Twyford has always been very dear to me, and I feel that, in casting him aside, you are making an irrevocable mistake."

"I knew you would say that." Cathy fiddled with the large ring on her finger, which cast stony and baleful gleams towards Aunt Amy, or so Aunt Amy felt. "You will get used to the idea, and, in the end, you will feel how very dependable and strong Jack Lorrimer is."

"You won't do anything in a hurry," Lady Carstairs said pleadingly. "Cathy darling, with all your charm, and loving you as I do, I know your greatest weakness. You lack balance."

Cathy put her arms round her aunt and sat at her feet. "I know I do, and you can't find that fault with Jack. He is as steady as the Dover cliffs or St. Paul's Cathedral. What I lack, he makes up a thousandfold. I think I shall be very safe with him, dearest. I don't pretend that I'm wildly in love, I never have been; and so I can judge clearly. I have given him my word."

"Even if you have, you gave Twyford an understanding."

"I never did," Cathy leaned back on her knees and put her hands over those of Lady Carstairs; "it was you, and all the rest of you, who built up that fiction. I wrote to Twyford directly I came back and told him what I intend to do."

Lady Carstairs sighed deeply. Twyford might put up a fight, but it was more likely that he would just go away. There was nothing to be said. No one could stop the marriage if Cathy had determined upon it, and Lady Carstairs had no further objections to put forward, but she did say one thing more.

"What will poor Monica Henstock do? I feel sure that she had every reason to expect that Colonel Lorrimer intended to marry her. You and she used to be such friends."

"Muggins?" Cathy looked startled. "Oh, Aunt Amy, you are quite wrong. Mug and Jack are old friends, nothing more, and I think she will be very glad."

"Do you, indeed?" Lady Carstairs shut her mouth firmly.

So the affair raged and rang, chiefly out of Cathy's hearing. Twyford went away and did not try to see her before leaving. He sent her a wedding present and left it at that, and Amyas hung about, depressed and heavy-eyed. He looked wretchedly dissipated and sulked like a schoolboy. Lilian, who came to Cathy to discuss affairs, was not very enthusiastic. She was able to see flaws in Lorrimer, and she was a tried and trusted friend of Twyford's. He had seen her before he left London, but he had said nothing at all about Lorrimer. She respected him from her heart, and she doubted the wisdom of Cathy's sudden choice. She had also been to see Monica, and Monica had, as she told Anthony upon her return, received her with open hostility, and had been in a savage temper.

"Monica is really in love with Jack Lorrimer," Lilian said, "and she is positively dangerous. If Cathy was ill, and she were to be called in, I think she'd poison her."

Everything seemed to point to turmoil, and Cathy was buffeted for her faith, but the more she was buffeted the more determined she became. She would believe none of the stories she heard. Twyford would get over it, Monica had written her a sweet and affectionate note, in which she had spoken of "her Jack" and "her Cathy," and as for Miss Batten, she was in the seventh heaven of abstract delight.

The wedding was to take place in June, but Cathy was too much employed in fencing and fighting to think very definitely of what lay beyond. They had all done their best to spoil things, and Janey Greenaway had come to say that she was hopelessly disappointed in Cathy. She had said so with her usual honesty, and on every side Cathy was met with the same steady attack. A fight stimulated her, and she was also busy with Lorrimer's election.

In spite of her avowed friendship, Monica seemed to have dropped out, and was too busy to lend her support, but she relinquished Miss Batten, who had now become secretary to Lorrimer himself.

Everything seemed jumbled and hurried. The election took place a week before her wedding, and Cathy went once or twice to hear Lorrimer speak. He appeared to go down with his hearers, and had made a foundation-stone of the word "Betterment." As Cathy sat in the packed schoolhouse, where he addressed his constituents, she experienced a strange little qualm once or twice. Lorrimer, on his feet, was just a little like Lorrimer as he had appeared to Aunt Amy and Robert, and even though he became a little flurried by questions hurled at him from various corners of the room, he carried through quite well.

The gardener from Kingslade sat well in the front and asked questions also, with a slightly suspicious readiness, arising out of the fact that he had been given a list beforehand, and put them at intervals in a good, loud voice, and at the end, when Lady Colebrook, who was in the chair, asked for a show of hands, there was hardly one which was not raised immediately in response.

Cathy was motoring back to London after tea, and the country looked fair and beautiful in the June sunlight. The walls of Kingslade were decorated with posters, all giving reasons why the constituents should vote for Lorrimer.

"Vote for Lorrimer and Good Housing." "Vote for Lorrimer and a Living Wage." There were others also. "Vote for Lorrimer who went over the Top for you," surrounded by a variety of patterns composed out of green and buff, which were his colours.

Major Hammersly, J.P., whose father had been an auctioneer, was Lorrimer's right-hand man, and Cathy reflected, as she sped through the wonderful glory of the evening, that she did not like Major Hammersly. He was a short, dark man, with a fluid, eager voice and heavy lidded eyes, and he seemed to know too much about everything. She remarked upon him to Otho, who was staying at Kingslade, and was the only member of the family who entirely approved of Cathy's engagement.

"He is damned useful, Cath," he said; "there have to be Hammerslys in all political stunts. He does the dirty work."

"I hate the idea of there being dirty work," she said, and her eyes were distressed.

In her short experience of Danielli's method there had been a great deal of abusive speech, but "dirty work," as such, was not needed. Hammersly had discovered that Trent, the Tory candidate, had once seduced a village girl, and he made the most of it. He had also discovered that the Labour candidate had been mixed up in a contract scandal, and had made a good thing out of the tax-payers.

"And what has Hammersly done himself?" Cathy asked.

"What hasn't he done would be nearer it," Otho said with his easy cynicism. "It's best not to inquire. The old father was really a money-lender, and the son is climbing. . . . Lorrimer likes him," he added, after a hardly perceptible pause.

Cathy was not unhappy as she sat in the car, but she was conscious of a feeling of *malaise*. She was very sure of Lorrimer's love for her, and it rested her; encircling her like a shadow on a hot, feverish day. In return for all he was prepared to give, she wanted to be just the Cathy he expected her to be. The prospect seemed a very happy and untroubled one, and yet, somewhere behind it all, there was a tiny, lurking shadow. She explained it to herself simply enough. Changes are always touched with some sense of loss. She was leaving her old life so soon, and those of her household who had loved her well for years were not content.

"I feel as if I was not myself," she said to Otho before she left. "I'm some one new. I've been taking things too seriously. An election and a marriage, one on the top of the other, is a weighty business, and I rather want to run away and pull my hair down and make daisy-chains."

Her cousin regarded her with a smile and began to whistle softly. He whistled extremely well, and he performed two bars of "My true love hath my heart."

"I'm rather glad I'm not going to marry you," he said; "not that this is meant in an uncomplimentary way. But does Lorrimer know how many people he proposes to wed? The Cathy who is an earnest Christian, the other who is a pagan, the next who loves dancing, and the one who wants to sell all her goods and give to the poor? The Cathy who is an imperialist and the other who is a republican? As for all the rest, the hidden Cathys, who must in due time become known to her husband, what will he do with them all? It looks as though only a polygamist could deal with you."

When the votes were counted, Lorrimer's name headed the poll by a good margin, and he came full of triumph to tell Cathy the news. It was what he had wanted so badly. He wanted to stand definitely upon his own feet before she became his wife, and to feel that he offered her something in the way of a recognised position. Several thousand of his fellow countrymen and women had put a cross beside his name on their voting papers, and he had confidence in himself at last. He had never allowed anyone else to guess the tremors he had suffered, or the strain it had all been on him. Otho had not the least idea of how much Lorrimer had leant upon him, and probably Major Hammersly was about the only person who had seen through the implied indifference of Lorrimer's manner.

From where Lorrimer stood, he felt as though the battle was won, and he rested on the complete satisfaction of that knowledge.

Cathy was delighted, though not surprised. She never had any misgivings about anything, but she was always able to rejoice gloriously. Even Lady Carstairs seemed less frigid, and appeared to think that, if Lorrimer could succeed in winning an election, he must be considerably more able than she fancied; for she still had an almost superstitious faith in the two letters M.P. It all happened at an entirely fortuitous moment, and the arrangements for the wedding, which had dragged heavily, began to move with a sudden *verve* and animation.

Lorrimer had decided, long before, to bribe the bridesmaids heavily, and he doubled the sum he intended to pay for the pendants which were to be his gift. With regard to Cathy, he had to be careful; if she was given anything very expensive, it was quite likely that she would return it, so he chose her present almost prayerfully.

One thought alone bothered him perpetually. Monica Henstock had behaved wonderfully well, written a perfectly expressed reply to his letter, and had been friendly and kind when they met some days later. But she was hurt, hurt to the soul, and Lorrimer minded it a great deal more than he fancied that he would. He would never marry Monica now, and they would go on being "pals," but the change was there, haggard and spectral. Cathy was all in all to him, but he had been—and probably was still—all in all to Monica. He put her away from his thoughts, but, as a kind of peace-offering, he ordered quantities of flowers to be sent to her twice a week, until she herself wrote a short line asking him to transfer the order to the Children's Hospital of Mercy.

CHAPTER XII

Marriage, that blindfold adventure, was embarked upon by Cathy in a doubting spirit, but her doubts and her misgivings had vanished by the end of six months. Her restlessness had gone, and she knew a contentment of mind which had never been hers before. Lorrimer seemed to understand her through some instinct, and, contrary to all prognostications, Cathy was entirely happy. Her life was full of interest, and she seemed to have developed into a far stronger and more definite woman than the Cathy of other days had promised to be.

Kingslade Park was beautiful, and the setting suited her to perfection, and yet the beauty and grace with which she was surrounded did not weigh upon her conscience. Life seemed to have declared that her path was to be a path of peace, and she had the satisfaction of hearing every day and every hour of the day, from either Lorrimer or Batkins, how much she helped everything onwards. It was almost an ideal *ménage,* and the house was a headquarters for Progressives, who gathered there to discuss their plans and schemes for the future.

A further change had taken place in the early Autumn, and Cathy awaited the arrival of a son with wild enthusiasm. Of course it would be a son, and she and Lorrimer talked together over all that they would do, to build for him, and start him with the right ideas. Monica had returned again, and was frequently at Kingslade when her work permitted, and there was literally nothing amiss in a best of all possible worlds. Lady Carstairs, whose original attitude towards Lorrimer had been about as encouraging as a north wind on a snowy day, altered gradually, until it became evident that she both admired and liked him; in fact, the sole adversary that he now had was Robert Amyas.

There were, of course, little things—very little things—which affected Cathy in her state of health. Her dislike for Hammersly was one, and could not be controlled. If he came into the room she left it, and she was entirely at a loss to understand why her husband appeared to enjoy his society. Hammersly made no effort to placate her after the first month or two, and merely effaced himself, but he stuck like a limpet, and there was no doubt that he was really Lorrimer's chosen friend.

Hammersly only laughed his deep, amused laugh, and said that he admired Mrs. Lorrimer enormously, through a telescope; but the general atmosphere of the house was that of unity.

February came in cold and bleak, and the lake in front of Kingslade Park was frozen. Bitter days succeeded one another, and Cathy grew petulant and irritable. She hated being shut up in the house, and Lorrimer fussed over her too much. Her room looked out over the lake, and its warmth and the gay hot-house flowers which were placed in tall vases ceased to please her eyes. Everything in the room had been chosen with attention and care; the deep sofa where she had been sitting was covered with silk, purple and gold, and the violet carpet was soft under her feet. Outside, the day was clear, with the cold, diamond clearness of east winds, and the white world shone with aching purity under the frigid sunlight. The trees stood clear and distinct, their tiniest branches rigid in the frost, and the ivy along the window-ledge was crusted over with sparkles. The world outside called to Cathy, and she longed impatiently to respond to its call. Lorrimer had begged of her not to go out; he was desperately anxious about her just now. Gradually, and unknown to himself, he was using less tact with Cathy than he had at first. Not that he ever took anything for granted, but, insensibly, he had become the possessor of the woman he loved. She told him that she wanted to go out, and he said that she was to remain within doors. Monica was expected at the week-end, and he felt safe the moment she put her foot over the threshold. But it was necessary that he should definitely assert himself.

"Where are you going, Jack?" Cathy asked him, as he stood, buttoned up to the chin, in a thick frieze coat, his fur gloves in his hands.

"I have to go to Haslemere," he replied; "Hammersly is coming with me. I want to see Rawnsley. There is a lot of yapping among the day labourers just now."

Cathy had been reading a letter, and she tore it up and made it into paper pellets which she began to throw at Lorrimer.

"I'm not nearly as good a shot as I used to be," she remarked, "I've missed you twice, fat man, and that *is* bad shooting."

"Will you be sensible?" he asked a little irritably. "Give me your word that you won't go out. It's as slippery as glass, and it might be very dangerous."

"Why are you taking Major Hammersly? I don't like him."

Cathy was in a provocative mood, and she played idly with the fur trimming on her dress. "He should be in a pawnshop, Jack, grinding the faces of the poor. Send him away, back to Jerusalem."

"Don't be so unfair," Lorrimer replied with a hint of retort. "I owe a great deal to Hammersly. He was invaluable at the election. Trent ran me close enough as it was."

"Oh, I remember." Cathy leaned back and looked at the fire. "Hammersly discovered a scandal. I like him none the better for it, if that is your reason."

Lorrimer came behind her and put his hands on her shoulders, bending down, while she looked up at his face.

"Are you going to promise me to stay in to-day?"

"How funny your face looks upside down," Cathy laughed. "Two chins, Jack—you are putting on weight, and your mouth—when first I saw you I didn't like your mouth—your nose looks too small from this end of you. It gets the perspective wrong, and you aren't yourself."

He pulled himself up at once, and stared through the window.

"If you have nothing else to say," he replied, "let us leave it at that, but you know what I feel," and he swung out of the room, closing the door behind him.

"Jack," she called after him, repentant at once, but he did not hear her, and a few minutes later she saw the car going down the cleared space along the avenue, with Lorrimer and Hammersly sitting together in the back, and the hood down. They were laughing and talking with the close intimacy of two men who are very good friends.

Something in the picture she had seen aggravated Cathy. Hammersly was intrinsically "wrong," and Lorrimer did not seem to be aware of it. Twyford would not have endured Hammersly for five minutes, and Robert Amyas would possibly have endured him and even have been entertained by his Rabelaisian stories, but he would have known exactly the man he really was. Lorrimer knew his wife's opinion of his friend, but, even so, he made him perpetually welcome at Kingslade.

She turned to the door which led to her bedroom, and, ringing for her maid, Cathy dressed quickly in a thick fur coat and cap, and went down the staircase and out into the clear, ringing world outside. She had no special purpose in her walk; what she wanted was air, and any sense of being locked in made her miserable. A sheltered walk led through a shrubbery and out into the village, and she chose this path as being preferable to the avenue, feeling her recent depression lifted from her as she went slowly under the lace-like tracery of the overhead branches. Kingslade Park stood only a very short way out of the village, and the gates actually opened on to the street. A wall surrounded the demesne, and Cathy had the key of a small entrance at the end of the shrubbery. Through this door you came out on to the main road, and a little footpath, higher than the road, ran for some miles south of Kingslade.

Having walked for about a quarter of a mile, Cathy began to wonder if she ought to turn back. She was feeling tired, and already her first joy in the clearness of the day was less intense. The road was lonely, and there was no one in sight except the distant figure of a man, walking rapidly, and swinging a stick as he went; he was only a tiny figure at a long distance off, and Cathy turned to retrace the path to the shrubbery gate just as he came in sight. Then Cathy's foot slipped on the melted snow, turning under her, and she slid helplessly down the bank, which was steep at that point, with a sick feeling of pain. Her foot was in agony, and she could not stir, but lay there in a piled heap of soft furs, her face white and her lips parted. An overwhelming sense of dread assailed her as she lay there. Was life always like this? One did something, quite a natural thing to do it might be, and the result was out of all proportion to the act. What had she done, not only to herself, but to the child of whom she was guardian? The pain she suffered was too acute to let her think clearly, and all that she was then aware of was the sound of footsteps running over the snow. She opened her eyes and looked up as a man bent over her, and she recognised Barlow. He knelt beside her, his face full of alarm and consideration for her, and raised her gently.

"Don't make the least effort," he said quietly; "just lean on me, Mrs. Lorrimer."

"I believe I've sprained my ankle," she said as she struggled to rise, and Barlow could feel that she was trembling violently.

He said nothing, but, putting his arm round her, gave her the support of his lean, wiry strength.

"I shouldn't try to talk. How far is it to the house?" he asked.

"Not very far, at least it usen't to be," she said with a pathetic effort at her old way of saying things; "only now it's miles and miles."

Still holding her in his arms, he looked at her, and thought rapidly.

"If I leave you here and get a carriage it will take time. I think I'd better carry you as far as I can."

Cathy was taken with another shivering fit.

"Don't go away," she said desperately. "But you can't carry me. I'll see how I get on."

Very slowly they made their way forward, each step paved with pain for Cathy; and Barlow looked up and down the road praying that some conveyance would come in sight; but the roads were heavy with deep snow and no one was about. It seemed as though an eternity passed before they gained the side door, and Barlow cleaned the snow off a rustic seat in the shrubbery and put her on it, sitting on his coat. He wore no overcoat, and did not appear to feel the cold, as he stood in his shirt-sleeves and talked to her as though he was admonishing a child.

"I shan't be gone ten minutes, and I'll bring something to take you to the house," he said firmly. "Try not to faint while I'm gone."

"You *are* good to me," she said helplessly; "I won't faint."

The situation was *bizarre* and almost grotesque, when she remembered how they had parted, and Barlow nodded at her encouragingly and began to run towards the house.

The sight of a very unusual looking man, in his shirt-sleeves, caused a stir in the stable quarters of Kingslade Park, and Barlow gave his orders with fierce abruptness.

"Have you anything you can take down the shrubbery path?" he asked. "Mrs. Lorrimer has sprained her ankle and can't walk. Look alive, man," he spoke to the head groom, "and get going. She may have fainted."

There was something, a small governess cart and a pony, used by Miss Batten, that could be brought at once, and, without waiting to hear further, Barlow turned away again and ran back to where he had left Cathy sitting on the seat near the gate. She seemed very ill, he thought, and he could only hold her hands and try to encourage her to bear the pain a little longer, and at last the pony trap arrived, and, with the help of the groom, Barlow lifted her in. He forgot his coat, which lay on the seat, and walked beside the governess cart, his mind greatly troubled.

"Is Colonel Lorrimer in the house?" he asked the groom, who replied that he was away; and Barlow muttered under his breath. There seemed to be no head of affairs anywhere, and the servants were all hopelessly scared and useless. When Cathy was brought in, Barlow carried her up to her room, and, followed by the maid, helped to lay her on the sofa by the fire. She was slightly delirious, he thought, and he asked for the name of the nearest doctor.

"Dr. Henstock always comes if there is illness," the maid said in an agitated whisper. "Perhaps Mrs. Watney, the housekeeper, knows of someone in the place."

"Send for her," said Barlow briefly.

Mrs. Watney came in response to the summons, and wrung her hands desperately over Cathy's prostrate form.

"It will be the death of her," she said, "the death of her."

"Don't be such a bloody fool," Barlow said roughly. "Where is the nearest doctor?"

"There is Dr. Townley, in the market-square," Mrs. Watney replied in affronted tones. She had begun to wonder who this man, who looked like a gentlemanly tramp, could be. "He hadn't even a coat to his back," she said, when describing the interview later.

"Send one of the men, and tell him to take a trap and bring back a doctor. If he doesn't come back with one inside an hour I'll break his ruddy neck."

Barlow walked out of the room and paced the corridor. He saw the danger ahead of Cathy, and he could hear her moaning, and talking in wild sentences, as her trouble became more acute. It seemed as though the doctor would never come, and at last Barlow went downstairs and stood on the steps.

Someone was coming at last, and in a car. His hopes were raised at once. Perhaps the doctor had been starting out, and had wasted no time; but as the car came nearer it disclosed the fact that Colonel Lorrimer himself was returning home.

Lorrimer's surprise and annoyance at seeing Barlow on the steps was unbounded. He looked wild, and he had not the smallest right to be there, but he shouted at Lorrimer directly he came within ear-shot.

"Turn the car round and fetch the doctor," he said. "Your wife is ill, and there isn't anyone here with as much as a head on their shoulders."

Lorrimer paid no attention; he got out and came up the steps, his face flushed and his manner affronted.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he said, and he made a slight movement with his arm.

"I tell you, man, your wife is ill. Can't you forget yourself for a minute? I found her in the road with a sprained ankle, and now it's likely to be worse than that."

"You must have frightened her." Lorrimer caught Barlow by the shoulder. "Get out."

Barlow extricated himself quickly and laughed.

"Not now, though I'll hammer you yet, Lorrimer; not now. At present it is a question of time. Are you going or am I?"

Lorrimer hesitated for a second. The choice was abominably difficult. Cathy was ill, how ill he could only guess, and, for some perfectly unaccountable reason, Barlow appeared to be in command. If he went, he left Barlow in this strange attitude of possession, and, if he sent him off in the car, it made things equally uncomfortable.

"As you don't seem to know what you mean to do, I'm going," Barlow said, solving the problem himself and climbing into the front seat of the car, while he wrapped a rug, which had been thrown over the cushions, around his shoulders. "Drive to the nearest doctor," he said sharply, turning to the chauffeur, who had watched the whole scene with impenetrable indifference, and who now prepared to do his bidding silently, while Lorrimer walked into the house.

Lorrimer was furiously angry, behind a fairly well assumed appearance of control, and he passed through a ring of servants, who scurried away at his approach, with the exception of Mrs. Watney, who bowed, and stood with folded hands to give her report. She had been called a "bloody fool" by an unknown man in his shirt-sleeves, and it affected her very much more than anything else, colouring her whole story. There was no real account of what had happened. Mrs. Lorrimer had gone out soon after Lorrimer left, and the next thing the household became aware of was that Mrs. Lorrimer was ill, and had come back with the unknown man—"or perhaps I ought to call him 'gentleman,'" Mrs. Watney said with acid emphasis. She did not say in so many words that she blamed Barlow for the whole trouble, but she conveyed the impression that she felt something very terrible had occurred, and that Barlow was certainly responsible.

"She must have had an awful fright," she repeated, "and now we must only 'ope and pray."

However, she had done more than hope and pray, and had sent another emissary to Kingslade with a telegram to be dispatched to Monica Henstock, asking her to come at once.

Lorrimer heard her out, and went up the staircase. The whole thing was a desperate shock to him, and he felt dimly that everything was at stake. His child, his wife, both were in imminent danger, and through Cathy's own folly. What, in God's name, could excuse such foolhardiness upon her part, and how had Barlow come into the story? He remembered that Barlow had worried Cathy; she admitted it to him once, when he had asked her about her visit to Hammersmith, and . . . He stood outside the door and listened to the ceaseless moaning from within. It was awful, and the sweat gathered on his forehead. He couldn't think of Barlow now, for Cathy was in danger—she might even slip away into the far off land of shadows and be lost to him for ever. If Barlow was accountable in any way for this, he felt that he would kill him.

If only Monica were there, she would know what to do; that thought bore him company as he sat beside Cathy's bed and looked at her marred, anguished face. If only someone would come. He began to long for the sound of Barlow's voice again; Barlow would be sure to get hold of a doctor; he would compel any doctor to come with him, if he had to do it by main force.

Time dragged intolerably, and Mrs. Watney begged of him to go away, for he seemed to make Cathy worse, and so he left her reluctantly; and as he sat in the library, his eyes on the clock, he heard the sound of the car returning up the avenue.

Barlow, draped about in a fox-skin rug, came into the room, dragging a man by the arm. It was not Doctor Townley, but an obscure little general practitioner from a poor quarter of the village. A wretched little creature with a battered face and a highly suspicious appearance of having drunk a great deal of gin in his life-time.

"I've brought Doctor——" Barlow turned to the man, "What's your name?"

"Luke," replied the doctor jerkily, "Thomas Luke."

"Well, he's the best I could get, and he knows more than that ass of a housekeeper. Bring him up."

Lorrimer obeyed, and led Dr. Luke away. He felt no sort of confidence in him, but, as Barlow had said, he was better than no one.

Barlow threw the rug on to the ground and walked into the hall. No one was about, and he saw that the car was still waiting. He walked down the steps and spoke to the chauffeur.

"I'm off," he said, "but I shall be staying at the Kingslade Arms. If you are anything of a good fellow, you might call in there to-night and ask for me. I want to know what has happened," he jerked his head towards the house. "You understand? Ask for George Barlow."

"Righto," said the chauffeur briefly; "I suppose I'll wait to take back the gin cask we've just left?"

"You'll be told what to do." Barlow rubbed his arms, for the wind was wintry and cold.

"I'll lend you a coat," added the chauffeur; "there's one inside the garage door if you like to borrow it."

"Thanks," Barlow said, with a nod; "my own is in the shrubbery. Mrs. Lorrimer was sitting on it," and he walked rapidly away.

The chauffeur watched him in silent astonishment. He had taken off his coat for Mrs. Lorrimer to sit on; a funny kind of game on a February day, and a queer sort of lunatic for Mrs. Lorrimer (whom he always alluded to as "Moddam") to sit out of doors with. He felt that he would drop in at the "Arms" just to have another look at Barlow, whom he fully suspected of being a gentleman, in spite of appearances.

It was late before Monica arrived, and by the time she got to Kingslade Park the village nurse and Doctor Luke, between them, had managed to pull Cathy through the deep waters. Only Cathy; for the small life which was to have meant so much never even flickered in this gusty world, where no one can tell why it is that some live and others die.

Monica and the London nurse made a strange contrast to Doctor Luke, with his blazing, red face, and the fat, rather sly-looking woman who was his colleague, but it was they who had saved Cathy's life. Lorrimer sat in the library and pretended to read, but when Monica came downstairs and they went into the dining-room to eat a belated dinner, he let himself go.

Until his hopes were dashed to the ground he had not known how much he had counted upon the child, and he could not dissociate his overwhelming disappointment from Cathy's deliberate disobedience of his express wishes.

"I told her not to go out," he said again and again to Monica, as they sat at their *tête-à-tête* meal; for Miss Batten had her own rooms and did not join the family, and at that moment she was sobbing on her bed. Memory had attacked her with spear and sword, and she felt stricken to the earth.

"Cathy is hopelessly careless," Monica said, frowning. "There is no use expecting reasonable conduct from her."

"She nearly killed herself as well," Lorrimer went on, his hands shaking as he poured himself out a glass of port. "How is she?"

"Frightfully weak. It will be a long time before she is better."

"Has she said what happened?" he asked.

Monica looked at Lorrimer guardedly. She had come to a kind of "second blooming" in the matter of looks, and she seemed very serene and handsome in the shaded light.

"Not yet," she said, flickering her eyelids. "I know nothing of the facts. Doctor Luke—what a dreadful person he is, Jack!—told me that a friend of yours had fetched him here in a wild state of excitement."

"A *friend*. Good God!" Lorrimer gave a short laugh. "It was that fellow Barlow. Cathy met him, I don't know where, nor do I know whether she intended to do so. I know nothing."

"George Barlow? Oh!" Monica gave a great deal of emphasis to the word.

"When I got back he was on the steps," Lorrimer said, and his rage sounded in his voice as he told Doctor Henstock the story.

For some time Monica was silent, and her silence affected Lorrimer and made him restless.

"Why don't you speak?" he said at last.

"I was thinking of what you told me," she replied cautiously. "You must not expect Cathy to be quite like other people. You see, Jack"—she leaned forward a little, and some of their old intimacy returned quite suddenly—"I know Cathy very much longer, and, in some ways, better than you do. She has always had a fancy for extremists, and she has a way of making her own actions appear justifiable to herself. Do you remember how very lightly she took the question of giving that emerald and diamond brooch to Danielli? It was not hers, but she gave it without so much as a thought."

"I remember," Lorrimer said grimly; "she has an elastic conscience in some things."

He was furious with his wife, for he would never have admitted this otherwise, even to Muggins.

"Barlow is a man who has a remarkable reputation for his persuasive powers where women are concerned," Monica went on evenly. "You must not be too hard on Cathy, she is full of imagination and can be worked upon. He may easily have persuaded her that she ought to see him. I can't blame her, for she saw it as a very natural thing to do."

"Natural to tell me nothing about it?" Lorrimer looked down, his face set and sulky. "You surely don't defend her there?"

"I don't know." She stared at the fire. "Cathy has always believed in the absolute right of individual choice. She *is* an individual, that is certain. When you married her, Jack," the tiniest little ice edge touched her voice as she spoke, "you knew, or you should have known, that you were accepting her reservations as well as her gifts." She got up and glanced at her watch. "I shall have to get back to-night, and you had better arrange for Doctor Townley to come in the morning"—she paused—"or perhaps, if you will send the car for me, I can manage the case myself."

"Of course I'll send the car"; he was anxious and nervous at once. "She will be better with you, Monica, and when she is able to listen to a little sense, you will show her how criminally selfish she has been over this."

Monica pulled on her coat, which was lying on a chair, and held out her hand.

"Don't make too much of it," she said helpfully. "In any case, Cathy will be out of any chance of getting into scrapes for some time to come."

"Weren't you to have taken your holiday?" he asked, still holding her hand. "Would it be very selfish of me to ask you to come here for the time? I want you so badly just now."

"Come here?" Monica looked around her and smiled, as though some fleeting memory amused her ironically. "I had meant to go to Switzerland."

And then her eyes returned to his face. All the things which had never been said between them seemed to hold them both silent, and at last she broke the uncanny spell and spoke in her cheerful, professional tones.

"I will come for a week, and see how she gets on," she said. "Cathy is a spoilt child and wants a scolding; but you are to blame, you have let her have her own way always."

"How do you stop a woman doing what she wants?" he asked desperately, and Monica smiled again but said nothing.

When she had gone, Lorrimer forgot all about her. He thought of his ruined hopes and of Cathy's wretched duplicity in the case of Barlow, and at last he rang the bell and sent for Mrs. Watney.

"I only know what I told you, sir," the housekeeper said, pursing up her lips dubiously. "The yard men know nothing more, except Jakes."

"What does Jakes know?" Lorrimer asked, biting the side of his forefinger and looking at the table.

"The gentleman told him that he and Mrs. Lorrimer had been sitting on his coat, on a seat in the shrubbery. She took the key with her, and, I suppose, admitted him by the side gate." Mrs. Watney spoke ponderously. "Considering the weather and the state of Mrs. Lorrimer's 'ealth——"

"You may go, Mrs. Watney," Lorrimer said ferociously, and he sat for a long time alone in the empty dining-room.

Cathy had made a rendezvous with Barlow, that was only too evident now, and had sat in the woods with him. The servants were talking, and Lorrimer did not give a thought to the fact that his own conduct was adding fuel to the fire. He did not suppose for a second that Cathy was encouraging Barlow, but she was hopelessly reckless, and had not the faintest idea of how these acts were explained by others. She had struck him a cruel blow, and had put her own life in danger, merely because she liked to play at anarchy with a man of Barlow's type. The disloyalty of it was, in itself, an offence, for Barlow was there to work up trouble among the day labourers. Hammersly, who knew the people well, said that the agitation was engineered by the Danielli crowd.

He was still thinking of his wrongs when Hammersly was shown in, and Lorrimer greeted him with a sense of relief. He asked for Mrs. Lorrimer, and sipped at a glass of port, his large, liquid eyes devoid of any special expression. Still Lorrimer said nothing.

"I hear that Barlow is in our midst," Hammersly remarked idly. "He is calling a meeting of day labourers to-morrow to draw up a strike programme. What a pestilential nuisance the fellow is."

Lorrimer lighted a cigar and looked angrily at the match he held.

"Where is the blighter?" he asked.

"At the Kingslade Arms. I looked in on my way here.

By the way, he appears to be on friendly terms with Jakes; they were sitting together in the room behind the bar. I didn't know that he was bitten by the Danielli microbe."

"Jakes? He'd better look out or he'll get the sack."

"Gently, man, gently." Hammersly laughed his musical laugh. "If you throw him out because of his political opinions you'll have dissatisfaction among the men here. They are very touchy these times."

"Were they talking the usual slush?" Lorrimer asked sharply. He was sure that Hammersly, who knew everything, knew more than he had said.

"Not so far as I could gather. In fact, Jakes was telling Barlow that Mrs. Lorrimer is, happily, out of immediate danger."

A flush rose to Lorrimer's hair and he clenched his fists suddenly in an uncontrollable access of anger.

"I think I'll clear out," Hammersly said, finishing his port and getting up from his chair. "I shall get news of Barlow's activities to-morrow, but there is trouble ahead. Wherever that man comes he brings trouble." He glanced obliquely at Lorrimer as he spoke. "Hopelessly untrustworthy in some respects; you understand me?"

"Oh, I understand you," Lorrimer replied, with a sneer at some indistinct object of anger, and he hardly answered Hammersly's friendly good night, or his hopes for Cathy's swift recovery to health.

CHAPTER XIII

As the days went by and Monica established herself at Kingslade Park, Lorrimer began to evolve a course of action. He did not know how far Doctor Henstock influenced him in this respect. She told him that Cathy was not in a fit state to discuss anything, and that if he was a wise man he would let the Barlow controversy drop.

The only time he alluded to it Cathy had been up in arms, and had said that she felt that she had been very unfair to George Barlow in the past, and would hear no word against him. Lorrimer had been foolish enough to touch upon the question when she was a little better, and had spoken of the trouble Barlow had caused in Kingslade. That evening, Cathy had a relapse, so Monica said, and for some days Lorrimer was forbidden to see his wife. Monica was as firm as a rock, and when Lady Carstairs came to see her niece, she was given five minutes alone with her, and warned to be very careful of what she said.

"Cathy is always excitable," Monica explained, with her sweet, rather wistful smile; "we know her, dear Lady Carstairs, and I need not tell you that, if she is upset now, even by the smallest thing, it may be extremely dangerous for her."

"But surely the trouble is over, Monica?" Lady Carstairs said sorrowfully. "Poor Jack, I do feel for him. He looks wretched. Still, there are many happy days ahead for them, as I told him. Florence Woodstock began with two misadventures, and they now have six dear little boys and girls."

"I have no fears for her physically," Monica said, standing by the window in the library, looking out over a bed of purple crocuses all in gorgeous blossom.

"You mean?" Lady Carstairs looked at the back of Dr. Henstock's head.

"Her mental energy has always been over active. It is of the greatest necessity that she should rest."

"Yes, indeed," Lady Carstairs sighed profoundly. "I can see that." She blew her nose and coughed doubtfully. "If you felt that I should excite her——"

"Not that," Monica turned quickly and smiled again; "only, when you do see her, will you make it a point to agree with whatever she says?"

"I see, I see," Lady Carstairs agreed. "How really providential that you are able to be here, Monica. It is noble of you to sacrifice your holiday. Jack told me of it."

She went up to Cathy's room, where the nurse was sitting sewing by the wide windows, and Cathy herself was lying on the sofa listlessly looking out at the sky. When she saw her aunt she raised herself on her arm, and greeted her with almost passionate enthusiasm.

"Nurse, you can go," she said, looking over Lady Carstairs' shoulder at the white-capped woman in the window; and the nurse got up and hesitated.

"Yes, you can go," added Lady Carstairs; "I shall not stay long, and I will call you the moment I leave."

At that, the nurse withdrew into the bedroom and closed the door.

"Aunt Amy, Aunt Amy, I'm not ill," Cathy said, holding Lady Carstairs' hands; "I really am not. I'm sure that I could be down and about, only for this ridiculous fuss. Just because I'm Cathy, I'm kept lying on my back."

"Patience, darling, patience," said Lady Carstairs. "Remember how anxious poor dear Jack feels. He looks wretched."

"Jack?" Cathy's tone was aggressive; "I've tried to make him understand, and he simply won't. He says that Muggins knows best, and he has that jailor of a nurse sitting there. It's enough to drive me off my head."

"Lie back, dear," Lady Carstairs said in a voice of alarm, for Cathy had got to her feet and was walking about the room. "If you don't, I really *must* call the nurse. I am only here because I promised you would be good."

"I'll be good." Cathy came back to her and lay down again. "Tell me about everyone. How is Robert? Have you seen Twyford?"

"Robert is very faithful," Lady Carstairs said kindly; "he came yesterday and sent you his love. I think he has improved, and Twyford—well, he is the same as ever."

"Did *he* ask for me? I'm not allowed to read even letters."

"I'm sure whatever Monica says is best"; Lady Carstairs patted Cathy's hand. "You look wonderfully well, dearest."

"I *am* well," Cathy broke out again; "that is the ridiculous part of it. Why won't they let me come down or see people?"

"Twyford is thinking of selling the London property," Aunt Amy said, seeking to turn the conversation to safer channels. "He has some idea of starting a School of Forestry for poor young men."

"*My* idea," Cathy clapped her hands delightedly. "But to think that at last Twyford is really going to do it." Her eyes were bright and she looked wonderfully vivid and beautiful, her hair in disorder and her embroidered dressing-gown pulled round her. "I'll write to Robert to-day. When Mug comes up to lecture me, I'll *make* her give me pens and paper, and I'll write to Twyford also."

"If Monica consents," added Lady Carstairs guardedly. "I am sure she will, only you must not excite yourself."

Cathy laughed. "Excite myself? Darling, if you only knew what my days are like you wouldn't accuse me of that. I mayn't read or write, I mayn't see people, I am fed on all the things I like least. What else has been happening in the world? Of course, a daily paper is out of the question."

Lady Carstairs reflected.

"There have been one or two very unpleasant murders," she said, and then she felt as though that was not altogether a suitable subject.

"Oh, tell me about them," Cathy said; "why did they do it?"

"And strikes," Lady Carstairs held up her hands; "strikes everywhere, Cathy. Thank goodness the authorities have at last imprisoned Danielli, but Barlow is still at large. I would not speak of this, only that I know that you changed your mind about these people. Jack converted you."

Cathy fiddled with a gold tassel on one of her cushions. "I think I misjudged Major Barlow," she said. "He isn't nearly as bad as people say. . . ."

The door of the bedroom opened imperceptibly, and the nurse stood with a watch in her hand.

"It is time for Mrs. Lorrimer's tonic, my lady," she said, in a dry, expressionless voice; "if you will excuse me."

Lady Carstairs got up at once, and kissed her niece.

"Patience, Cathy," she said again. "You are looking far better than I expected."

"Oh, must you go?" Cathy implored, but she implored in vain, for Lady Carstairs caught a silent signal from the nurse, and made her way quietly from the room.

"I think Cathy looks very well," she said to Monica, who met her in the hall.

"Will you come into the library for a second?" Monica suggested, and Lady Carstairs went in, feeling strangely disturbed in mind.

"Did she speak of George Barlow?" Monica asked, and she put the question keenly, holding Lady Carstairs' eyes.

"She did mention him," Lady Carstairs replied, "but only just as I was leaving. Ought I to have avoided the subject?"

Monica looked at her strong, well-shaped hands.

"We heard the story from outside sources," she said slowly, "and I have asked Jack not to question Cathy, nor have I questioned her myself in the matter. All we know is that she met Barlow in the shrubbery," she glanced up and smiled, "so like Cathy, isn't it? And then she must have sprained her ankle and had a fall. The fall was responsible for the trouble, and you know that there is a very close connection between mental and physical conditions. While Cathy was delirious, she constantly called to George Barlow and asked him not to leave her. It was the first we knew of any fresh communications between her and Jane Greenaway's friends."

Lady Carstairs was profoundly shocked.

"Oh dear," she said; "how unfortunate."

"I have avoided the subject," Monica went on firmly, "and, as I said, I have advised Jack to avoid it. Cathy is excitable, and she needs quiet. The difficulty of keeping her quiet is simply absurd; you can't dream, dear Lady Carstairs, how she has to be watched."

"But a few books or a letter now and then," Lady Carstairs put in her plea in a hesitating voice. "Would it not be well to allow her some outlet for all her energy? I know that when I had a rest cure, I felt wretchedly ill after it; and for Cathy it is torture. Monica, are you sure that it is wise?"

Doctor Henstock regarded Lady Carstairs with a steady, frigid look.

"You must allow me to know what is best for any of my patients," she said formally. "When Cathy is well enough to spend her mental energy again in her usual lavish way, she shall do so, but not until then." She thought for a second, and went on in a more friendly voice, "Women of Cathy's imaginative temperament are subject to special dangers; at present, I believe that Cathy's mind is now turning towards the Danielli group, and they are dangerous for her. She lives in a world divided between dreams and realities, and at present the dream preponderates."

"But you could say that of almost anyone," Lady Carstairs objected; "I don't quite see that it applies to Cathy alone." She was slightly irritated by Monica's superiority. "You yourself, dear Monica, once thought very differently; when you were fighting for the vote, you did not regard that as a phantasy. You even went to prison."

"I fought on a clear issue"; Monica got to her feet and the platform manner became immediately evident. "Cathy is not ever entirely convinced, because people and personalities obstruct her view. Jane Greenaway and George Barlow, most unfortunately, also influence her; she has no special sense of the value of their work, or its destructive force. For Jack's sake, she must wake from her dreams, and to arrive at that she needs quiet—which I intend her to have."

"It seems to me"—Lady Carstairs rose and held out her hand—"that you are trying to make Cathy into something she has never been. I doubt if you will succeed."

Monica saw Lady Carstairs to the door, and watched her departure silently, and, when she had gone, she went to look for Lorimer, who was in the stables. He greeted her with a cheery shout from the darkness of a loose box, and, joining him in the gloom, she informed him of Lady Carstairs' desire to interfere.

"She positively tried to lay down the law to me," she said, "but I don't stand that sort of thing."

Lorrimer looked at her admiringly. There was a great deal in Monica for a man to admire, and he felt always that he and she were fundamentally allied. All the others had known different beginnings, but he and Monica had funny little memories in common, memories which cropped up like daisies in the spring grasses. For a second, as she stood close to him, and he held "Rainy Day" by the head-stall, he was tremendously moved by an unexpected impulse, and her hand lay on the grey neck of the hunter. Without pausing to consider what he was doing, and only acting swiftly, as though carried upon burning wings of fire, he put his hand over hers, and life tingled and beat through them both in the silence.

It was Monica who recovered the situation, and she did it very deftly indeed. She pressed his hand in friendly fashion and picked up the dropped thread of her story.

"I found that Cathy had spoken of George Barlow, but told her aunt very little," she said, and her voice was a little uneven. "I am sure, Jack, that you must not ask for any particulars yet. Cathy is the soul of candour, really, and she will tell you herself later on."

"I'm going to motor over to see Jesson; he is staying at the Dacre Willoughby's," Lorrimer said, without making any reference to her allusion to Cathy. "Come with me, the air will do you good. I've taken your holiday from you, Monica, and you must let me make it up to you a bit."

"I might spare the time. There's that pathological treatise, you know," she said, considering; "but it's a temptation. Yes, Jack, I will come."

She did not wait, though he wanted to detain her, and he came out into the sunny yard, with its neat rows of white doors, to watch her walk to the house, and as he watched her his face altered and he looked depressed and dissatisfied. Later on, he went up to Cathy's room, and found her lying on the sofa. She welcomed him gladly, and began at once to ask if he couldn't do anything with Monica's awful conscience.

"She is literally nursing me into morbidity," Cathy said. "I want to come out and play. It's been pretty bad, Jack, the disappointment and all."

He thought of his own disappointment and her disobedience, and said nothing for a little, watching her changing eyes, and thinking that certainly he had a very beautiful wife. Why was it that, at times, her lack of some of Monica's sterling qualities was so abominably difficult to endure? Cathy was a child, Monica frequently told him that, and Monica was a woman.

"You did what I asked you not to do, once," he said, frowning, "and I needn't speak of that now, Cathy. If Monica feels it is for your good to rest, you can't be surprised that I second her."

Cathy said nothing more. She had a box of patience cards, which relaxation was permitted to her, and she swept them on to the floor.

"Why did you do that?" he asked, and stooping to pick up the cards.

"Don't deprive me of my one employment," she said, holding out her hands; "I do it twenty times a day."

And then, when he looked up at her, he saw that her clear eyes were full of tears. He was repentant at once, and took her in his arms.

"What can I do?" he said. "What can I do?"

"Send away the nurse. I don't mind the night-nurse because I'm asleep, but the sight of those cuffs and that cap, and the stories of people's insides, which is all I ever hear, make me frantic. Let me have Batkins to sit here instead, she isn't busy in the afternoons."

"I'll ask Monica," he agreed; "I'm sure she won't object."

Cathy looked mutinous. "Monica, Monica the Almighty," she said, and then she laughed. "I really feel as though I ought to be saying my prayers to her. I do hope God isn't like Monica."

Lorrimer looked at her reprovingly, but he renewed his promise that Batkins should replace Nurse Binns during the afternoons.

When Monica first began to realise that Jack was the man she used to know and love, and that his old self had not really been absorbed in Lorrimer, the M.P. for Kingslade, and husband of Cathy Rossiter, the revelation was tremendous. She tried to forget it, to put it away, and to keep it out of sight when they were together, but the joy in her heart could not be disregarded and ignored. She was happy, and she came to a compromise with herself, she who despised compromise. Cathy had fascinated Lorrimer, hypnotised him, and thrown her wonderful net of glamour over his judgments. She had been above him by right of birth, and he was only on the threshold of his own career. Cathy had certainly helped him, and had brought him into the inner circle of things without effort. But behind all that there was Jack Lorrimer as Monica had known him; the Jack of old days, who had cherished an unspoken love for the girl in the villa opposite. Lad's love, of course, and not to be set beside the mature love of a man of forty: so the world judges these things. Now they were together, Monica and Lorrimer, and Cathy was in disgrace. The contrast between the two women was marked quite definitely, and Monica was closely and strongly in sympathy with all Lorrimer's plans and schemes. In the evenings, when she and Lorrimer sat in the quiet of the library, he felt her moderation to be intensely soothing, and he never found himself swept into heated argument, such as Cathy was inclined to provoke. Cathy was like the sea; wide, wonderful and full of life, and Monica was like a river upon which he drifted, borne where he wished to go by a steady, reliable current which did not vary. They had neither of them a thought of disloyalty to Cathy, but the fundamental attraction of like to like was stronger than they guessed. At what point exactly his friendship for her began to take on a different guise, Lorrimer did not know. He was not in the habit of facing things, and he certainly did not wish to question himself as to this. He only knew that, as things were, he was unusually happy, and they both agreed that Cathy would soon be better, but that, for her own sake, she must remain a prisoner for some time longer.

It was Hammersly who first realised exactly what was going on, and he came to Kingslade more frequently than before. Monica appreciated him, he saw to that, and he thought with a smile of Cathy's open dislike. Mrs. Lorrimer had chosen to make him her enemy, and he brooded at times on the possibility of squaring their account.

"Lorrimer will go far," he remarked to Monica as she gave him tea one afternoon when Jack was away in London; "at least, he would if it were not for his wife."

Hammersly was sitting by the window, looking extremely well content, and bringing his usual effect of cleverness and self-satisfaction into his smallest movement. "I know she is a friend of yours, Doctor Henstock, but, even so, I will be quite frank. She will ruin his career."

"I don't agree," Monica said at once. "She is a clever and very charming woman."

"Hopelessly unbalanced," he replied, stirring his tea reflectively, "and just the type of woman who can't be trusted. She is hand in glove with Barlow and the Danielli crowd, and she has influence enough over Lorrimer to make him suspect in his own party. These days everything is dug up and questions are asked. Only last week," he smoothed his thick, dark hair, "I met Jesson, quite by accident, at the house of a mutual friend, and he spoke to me of Lorrimer. He then asked me," Hammersly grew emphatic, "whether it was true that Mrs. Lorrimer was in touch with the Bolshevik crowd. I said that she was not—naturally it wasn't for me to give the show away—and he looked at me, and remarked that he must be sure of that."

"A great deal of it is talk with Cathy," Monica said, after a slight pause. "Perhaps if she understood that she might damage Jack's prospects——"

Hammersly shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"Since she has been ill, I have got Lorrimer to come on to two committees which he wouldn't have touched had she been there to prevent it. His marriage was the mistake of his life."

Monica flushed suddenly. She had felt this very often herself, and to hear it said by Hammersly seemed to strengthen her belief.

"Oh, well, I suppose no one can have it every way," Hammersly remarked with a laugh, "only she won't make him happy. Can't you give her a hint to drop Barlow, at least? The whole county knows about her having met him in the Park."

"Not at present," Monica compressed her lips; "she is still very excitable."

Hammersly watched her and placed his cup on the tea-table.

"Mental exuberance, or something worse?" he enquired.

"Only a matter of time," Monica said slowly. "She will soon be able to come down and be about again."

"And you will hate me if I say, 'more's the pity.'" He got up and prepared to go. "Yet, if you want to do the best thing you can for Lorrimer, let him have a chance of being himself. So long as his wife is at his elbow, none of us know what her influence may force him into." He laughed. "Of all the unreasonable women I have known, and I have known many, Mrs. Lorrimer is quite the wildest. Thrones must fall at her nod, and the whole complicated system of ownership is to be swept away. Ah, well, I suppose her fine eyes make up for her lack of judgment."

Monica thought for a long time after Hammersly had gone, and then she went up to see Cathy. Spring had called the daffodils into flower, and the garden below Cathy's window was gay and bright, but Cathy herself was weary and restless. Her life had always been a life of action, coloured by impulses which were warm and rich and chivalrous, and she looked at Monica with a sidelong glance; she seemed too weary to lift her eyelids. Her mind had been running in a close groove of pain, and she fiddled with her patience cards. She was evidently irritable and out of sorts, and her voice was touched with temper.

"How long, O Lord, how long?" she asked, and yawned.

"Very soon now, if you are a good child." Monica gave her an infinitesimal kiss on the cheek.

Cathy pulled at her Venetian red dress, and tore a bit of the trimming with impatient fingers. She rested, as she had been resting when Monica came in, with her neck drooping, and her eyes cast down.

"Prison is dull," she said, laughing without mirth, and Monica began to talk quickly. She told Cathy all the news and was cheerful and common-place, but Cathy did not respond. She seemed to have given in to circumstances which overpowered her, and only raised her eyebrows, and let the talk drift by almost unnoticed.

"Can't Batkins take her turn as my jailor?" she said; "I asked Jack, but nothing has been done."

"Of course she can," Monica agreed heartily. "Look here, Cath, don't be so difficult about it. Soon you will be quite well, if you go on as you have been going. Only, if you relapse into this new phase, I can promise nothing."

Cathy looked up steadily and watched Monica.

"I *am* well," she said, "only I'm tired of saying so. Only don't trouble to stay up here, I'd rather be alone."

"To-morrow Batkins will come and cheer you up," Monica said in friendly tones. "Buck up, Cathy. I had one case where my patient was months in her room after just the same kind of indiscretion."

Cathy made no reply, and Monica went out of the room. She was not expecting Lorrimer back before dusk, and she was thinking madly of him. At the end of a week Cathy must be free, and her freedom would put an end to the feast which she had been enjoying in secret. There were times when Monica's cup of joy was brimming over, but it might only be drunk of in hasty snatches, unacknowledged even to herself. Now, it was as though she had set the term to her own joy, a joy which would vanish as completely as though it had never existed for her. It had come to her unsought, and, so far, not one word or act had passed between her and Lorrimer which could be called into question. Her heart was beating wildly as she descended the stairs, and every human impulse she had cried out in her for her right to be loved. She had none of the bewildering romance of Cathy; she was clean cut, not illusive, and she loved Jack from her heart. All that she had lost came upon her, and, going into the library, she sat down in his chair and buried her face in her arms.

She raised her head suddenly and listened, and before she could recover herself Lorrimer came quickly into the room. He caught her abandonment, her hopeless submission to fate and the whole sense of her distress, long before she had power to draw the curtain and hide away from him, and in a moment she was experiencing the strong clasp of his arms.

"What is wrong, Monica?" he said in a low voice; "I was able to get back sooner than I thought. Tell me what is wrong."

Some power infinitely stronger than anything that Monica had known drew their faces together, and their lips met. It was only for a second, and Lorrimer started away.

"My God," he said, "I never meant you to know," and as he said it, he realised that he himself had not known. He had grown to think of her constantly, to depend upon her judgments, but he had not dreamed that he would let himself break through like this, and he was abashed and ashamed.

"Let us forget this," Monica said quickly; "it has not really happened, Jack. You only wanted to be kind to an old friend."

Yes, that was it. That explained it. One could cover it up quite well, really, and he looked at her again. It was true that he felt smitten by the realisation that, from the first, Monica had really been his own. Her face was dead white and her eyes were on fire, but she kept a wonderful hold upon herself. She might have been praying silently, and her quietude held him up.

"Cathy is better," she said, rallying her forces; "I think she will soon be able to be with you again."

Lorrimer bent his head, accepting the fact, and Monica went on, "For the little time that is left let us have our friendship, Jack. It means so much."

It seemed possible to both of them, and they said no more of it.

Cathy was not sleeping well. Nurse Binns came to report upon the fact, and said that she needed a narcotic. All the night before Mrs. Lorrimer had paced her room, roaming about with flushed cheeks, and obviously miserable and wretched. Monica, who was dressing for dinner, was immediately ready for the emergency, and she gave the nurse a small tube of tabloids with short directions as to how much should be used. Nurse Binns stood by the dressing-table, formal and stiff, and remarked that her patient objected to drugs.

"I shall have to give it to her in a cup of hot milk," she said. "Do you really think, Doctor Henstock, that Mrs. Lorrimer is any better? I don't mean physically, of course, but she talks very wildly. She ordered me out of the room twice," went on Nurse Binns vindictively; "I do my best to interest her, and it's a thankless task; I hear that I am to be relieved in the afternoons by Miss Batten?"

"Yes," Monica said absently. "In any case, Mrs. Lorrimer will be allowed out of her room next week."

Nurse Binns looked gloomy, and made no reply, but, as she went to the door, she spoke again.

"Miss Batten can control Mrs. Lorrimer, I suppose? She is very self-willed."

"She will be all right," Monica replied in the same mechanical voice, and she seemed not to take any special notice of what Nurse Binns had said.

At dinner, she spoke again of Cathy, and she told Lorrimer that she was not entirely happy about her. They were sitting over dessert, and there was a strange, new feeling between them which they both tried to forget.

"Nurse Binns has attended a number of mental cases," she said, "and she feels that Cathy is unbalanced. She seems to regard her condition as slightly anxious——"

"What do you mean?" Lorrimer spoke like a man who waked suddenly from sleep. "I don't understand."

"Nothing," Monica said quickly. "It is only that Cathy talks so wildly at times."

"She always says whatever she thinks," he replied.

He seemed driven and unhappy, and the conversation fell again into a throbbing abyss of silence.

"If Cathy is still over-excitable at the end of a week, I think a change will be the best thing for her," Monica talked again suddenly. "A rest cure is excellent, and might do just what we want."

Lorrimer rose from the table and opened one of the long windows. The night was a soft spring night, full of scent and beauty, and a low moon spread dark shadows across the lawn beyond the windows.

"Shall we go out?" he asked. "We could sit in the big conservatory and have coffee there. I have to go and dictate some letters to Miss Batten presently, but not yet."

They crossed the grass, the house standing in its dignity and pride behind them, and went along a wide, paved terrace towards the large conservatory, where the perfume of flowers was rich and sweet. In a well-like space in the centre of the winter garden there were a few low chairs and a table, and an electric lamp with a gorgeous crimson and black shade threw a very faint radiance around them. Monica sat in the temperate warmth of the soft atmosphere and breathed the summer scented air of the lofty conservatory with a sense of ecstasy. They might have shared all the joy of pleasures and palaces, if it were not for Cathy; Cathy who professed to scorn the soft things of life.

Lorrimer forgot about Miss Batten, and the letters remained unanswered that night; but she heard him come in with Monica long after she herself had gone to bed.

CHAPTER XIV

The idea of being cheered and even excited by the prospect of having Batkins to sit in the room with her, was so real and at the same time so ridiculous to Cathy that she laughed at herself. She had slept quite well, and when Lorrimer came to see her in the morning, she made fun of him, and began to tease him about Muggins.

"I believe you keep me here so as to have a clear way with Mug," she said. "What in the world do you talk about?"

"Monica gave up her holiday to take care of you," he replied a little frostily; "I must make it up to her, Cathy. I'm taking her up with me to-day for the debate. We may be late back."

"I'm so bored," Cathy went on; "*I* want someone to amuse me. I'd love to see Robert again. Can't he come and sit on a footstool and kiss my feet, or something harmless like that, if he promised not to speak?"

"Amyas?" Lorrimer's voice was unmistakably disapproving, but he checked himself directly and spoke pleasantly. "Later on, Cathy, later on. You really do feel better?"

"Better? I loathe the word, I'm *well,* Jack." She began to talk quickly. "Why shouldn't I be allowed to sit in the garden? I walk about my room——"

"You ought not to," he said, "and if you do, you are only taking chances which you have no right to take. If you do this again, what am I to think?"

Cathy shook her head. "Don't scold," she said, turning away from him. "I have enough to bear without that."

"And I?" He tried to curb his temper, but it seemed that the effort went beyond him. "Have I nothing to bear and to forgive? You forget things quickly."

He waited for her to answer, but she made no reply, and at last he went away. What was the use of these interviews? They only made for growing strife.

Batkins, in a serge coat and skirt and a neat tie, came to relieve Nurse Binns at three o'clock, and she found Cathy at the window. Mrs. Lorrimer was wearing a thin silk gown of peacock blue, with green and gold embroidery over the arms and along the hem. Her joy at seeing Batkins was unbounded, and Cathy told her that she felt as though life had become real again.

"I've often wondered if the Cathy they keep here under lock and key is really Cathy Rossiter," she said. "Such a queer, cross Cathy, Batkins. I tried to fight with Jack today, and when I saw him going away with old Muggins I very nearly cried. Muggins has been a saint, and Jack an angel, and I get absolutely rabid with them both. As for Binns—I think Binns is the devil. She says things that she knows will rise me, and I rise like a trout to a may-fly."

It was delightful in Cathy's room, and she and Miss Batten drank tea together at four o'clock, and chatted and gossiped in the stream of yellow sunlight which flooded in through the open window.

"Life is so queer," Cathy said, her eyes growing dreamy. "Sometimes it seems to me that one lives in the past, and that the roses and summer days of three years back are far more real than the living things one looks at now. Am I my real self, Batkins? Just the me you used to know?"

"Of course you are," Miss Batten assured her, "only that you grow more lovely," she added shyly.

She looked down and flushed slightly, because Batkins had a sensitive conscience, for she no longer wondered whether it was her fancy, or whether she had really surprised a look in Lorrimer's eyes when he spoke to Monica which alarmed her profoundly.

"I think," she went on cautiously, "that it will be a very good thing when you come down again."

Cathy looked at her and her eyes were a little puzzled.

"He isn't lonely," she said, half questioning Miss Batten. "Muggins keeps Jack from being dull, and Major Hammersly. I do dislike that man, Batkins; Beelzebub Junior."

"Doctor Henstock will *have* to leave here soon," Miss Batten remarked, and again she became self-conscious.

"What are you driving at, Bat?" Cathy laughed and held up a finger at her. "Do you suspect Mug of the notion of cutting me out? Let her try."

"I owe a great deal to Doctor Henstock," Miss Batten said painfully, "but I have never cared for her. When I was acting as her secretary," she spoke primly, "I felt that——" she stopped abruptly. "I was not at home there, and perhaps I am a little prejudiced."

Cathy's attention wandered. She was pleased to hear Batkins straying on from one subject to another, but her interest lessened. Perhaps Mug was really in love with Jack. There had been the day when she first met him; the cake and the box of cigarettes. There had been many other days when Lorrimer had been there, and Mug had no one else to go and see her. How stupid she had been not to realise that she had taken away Mug's one great friend. Well, if it were so, Muggins had behaved wonderfully, but the subject needed thinking over. Anyhow, at present she must be happy, for Jack seemed to be doing all he could to make up to her for the loss of her holiday.

The grounds looked very inviting in the soft sunlight, and the early spring flowers played in the light wind. A distant row of firs showed a soft, fluffy green against the sky, it was not a time to think of the crowds who eat their bread with tears, it was a day in which to believe in angels. From where she sat she could catch a glimpse of the broad, red avenue, leading on to the gates a long way out of sight; the fine, imposing gates of Kingslade Park, where heraldic beasts pranced and upheld emblazoned shields. Cathy's attention wandered again, and she longed to go out under the sky; she wanted to sail before the wind on a blue sea, to run until she was tired, in a hidden valley, warm and sweet, she wanted to throw herself on the grass and smell the violets, and she, a real woman, who had come out of eternity, sat, like an old lady, at a window and did nothing.

Miss Batten talked on; and Cathy began to feel as though she were waiting for something to happen. What was it?

Some snatch of joy, like the forgotten refrain of a song, coming to her out of space? She leaned on the window ledge and looked down at the path below, and as she did so she felt a thrill of mischievous pleasure. It was true of Cathy that she always liked all men, with a very few exceptions, and when she saw George Barlow standing staring up at the house, she forgot that she had ever actively disliked him. He caught sight of her at once and waved his hand.

"Come down," he said, "I want to talk to you."

It was highly characteristic of Barlow to demand the impossible with complete nonchalance. Cathy shook her head, and said, "No."

"Only a minute," he said again. "Don't be cowardly."

Cathy reflected, and she felt Batkins tug at her gown like a faithful terrier.

"It is someone I know," she turned and spoke to Miss Batten, and saw her scared face of alarm.

After all, she was a free woman, and if she chose to go downstairs no one could prevent it. Moreover, if she really asserted herself, she might convince Muggins that restraint is not the best cure for some natures. The whole affair presented itself to her in the guise of an adventure, and she became intrigued by the mere fascination of so glorious a break in the endless monotony of her days. Cathy did not know anything of what popular report had said as to her former meeting with Barlow, and both Jack and Monica had been intensely guarded on the subject when she had tried to speak of it to either of them. Monica was off in London, Binns wouldn't know, and Batkins could be trusted. Certainly, Cathy had every intention of going.

"Don't make any fuss, Batkins," she said. "I won't be gone two seconds."

Miss Batten threw herself between Cathy and the door. "You must not go," she implored; "I am here to take care of you, and I will take care of you. Colonel Lorrimer trusted me." She was trembling, but she stood her ground. "It is not fair, Miss Rossiter," she relapsed to the old name in her confusion.

"I'll tell them it was my fault. If I am miles better to-morrow, as I shall be, and after Muggins has admitted that I am, I shall tell her, and you can't be blamed. Here, Batkins, let me out." Cathy was alive with excitement, and she caught Miss Batten by the wrists. "Now, Batkins, now," she said, pulling her from the door, "I won't be five minutes. I shall slip down the back staircase, and there is no one about, and when I come back I'll apologise."

Miss Batten was small and fragile, and there was no strength in her tiny wrists, and Cathy hardly knew how strong she was. The whole adventure became worth a struggle. It hardly took more than a second for her to open the door of her room and go down the staircase, though the stairs were more difficult than she had imagined they would be, and as she went out into the garden she saw Barlow still waiting there.

"I've come here partly as a protest," Cathy said, laughing, "partly because the sunshine got into my head, and mostly because I have gradually come to a point where I was bound to flare up into revolution."

"Then you choose a very suitable person to meet," Barlow said, with his chuckling laugh. "Are you really content with Lorrimer's bread and milk diet? Aren't you a bit bored? You know that he is going against Disestablishment of the Church and the Majority Report of the Divorce Commission? Oh, he hasn't told you that? They are only very minor questions, but I fancied they stood for Lorrimer's bravest piece of daring."

They had walked along the gravel path, and stood by a bed of irises in full blossom.

Cathy stared at Barlow. "I don't understand," she said. "Jack wanted equal laws for men and women, and he felt that there was no special justification for one Church to be paramount. You are really telling me the truth?"

"Certainly." Barlow fumbled in his pocket and took out a paper, in which two paragraphs were marked in blue pencil; "you can read it for yourself. I came here," he added, when she handed him back the paper silently, "to find out whether you still took any interest in Janey's work and ours, and because Jakes, your husband's chauffeur, told me you were nothing better than a prisoner in the house."

"Jakes shouldn't have said anything of the kind," Cathy spoke quickly, "I am being taken too much care of, that is all."

She seemed to feel suddenly as though she had no real right to be out there in the gay, wind-swept garden. She looked uneasily at Barlow and glanced towards the house; the window of the room belonging to Nurse Binns was open, and Nurse Binns herself was standing there watching them. In spite of herself, Cathy felt her spirit quail, and she turned to Barlow.

"I've been caught red-handed," she said, "and I feel as if I was ten years old, when I was at the mercy of Signorina's temper. I'm going back."

"No, you're not," he objected. "I have a great deal more to tell you yet, and where is your independence of spirit?"

"You haven't been shut up for two months," she said.

"Yes, I have," he retorted. "I did three months once, and at another time I had a six months' Government rest cure, with hard labour."

He had suffered for his convictions, you could not ever escape from that, but Nurse Binns was watching her, her eyes like gimlets boring holes in Cathy's armour of courage.

"Give Janey my love," she said, "and tell her that I am not a renegade. With regard to what you have said about Jack, I simply can't understand it."

She began to retrace her steps, Barlow walking close to her, and holding her to support her slightly, for she was obviously tired with the unusual excitement.

"I think I can explain it," he said. "The Progressive Party," he gave a snort of contemptuous laughter, "are simply a pack of Tories on the make. They have been bought, Mrs. Lorrimer. If they vote alongside of the Government they swamp us. Lorrimer is likely to be angled for, but before he is worth the bait he has to prove his conversion."

"Jack couldn't do a thing like that," Cathy said hotly;

"it is a mistake, I *know* it is." She held out her hand and Barlow took it in both of his.

"I haven't upset you?" he asked anxiously, "I do hope I haven't. You're looking much stronger."

Nurse Binns was standing in the doorway, hard of eye and impenetrable of demeanour.

"I had no orders from Doctor Henstock saying that you were to go out, Mrs. Lorrimer," she said, in a voice which sounded as harsh and hard as her starched cuffs. "I suppose that Miss Batten was told that you might walk?"

"Good-bye, Major Barlow." Cathy turned from him and faced Nurse Binns. "I came out entirely on my own responsibility, and I do not require you. Miss Batten is in my room."

She passed her without glancing back, and went up the staircase. Her interview with Barlow had made her forget the joke of it all, and she looked serious enough when she re-entered her room. Batkins was sitting by the window, her eyes red and her mouth quivering; she had evidently been sobbing quietly, in her usual submissive way, putting up no fight at all. Cathy heard the footsteps of Nurse Binns in the corridor, and she shut the door at once, locking it in her face.

"I don't require you," she replied to the repeated knocking on the further side.

"Oh, Batkins, I am a ruthless wretch," she said, putting her arms around the little governess. "But I am glad I went out, because I find that there are all sorts of lies being circulated about Jack. There!" She held Miss Batten at arm's length. "There is nothing to cry about. It's done me all the good in the world."

"Doctor Henstock will be furious," Miss Batten said plaintively, "and that terrible Nurse Binns. Did you hear how she shook the door handle? It makes me so frightened."

"They won't eat us," Cathy said easily. "I'm not a child. I shall have Binns sent away, she is positively impertinent. Courage, Batkins—did I hurt your wrists? I believe I did!"

"That is nothing," Miss Batten pulled down her sleeves, "only when Doctor Henstock comes. . . . I'm afraid of her."

"I'll tackle them all," Cathy laughed. "Leave them to me."

It was very late when Lorrimer and Monica came back; they had dined at the House, and Jack had made one of his short, hesitating speeches, which even Monica could hardly regard as oratory. During the drive down Jack had held Monica's hands in his, and he had kissed her passionately. They had not got beyond the discovery of one another, and the future was hardly real to them in the urgency of the living present. If Lorrimer had been forced to say what he thought, he would have admitted that he had not really thought yet. Nothing would come of it, in the sense of a break with Cathy, no one would ever know; he and Monica would remain friends outwardly, even if they were lovers behind the screen of friendship. Not for worlds, and not for any passionate desire, would he wreck his own life with its prospects, and he would not harm Monica. Vaguely outlined, this was the summing up of his feelings. Many public men had found themselves in the same difficult position, and appearances had been preserved inviolate. Even with the happiness it brought, he was conscious of distress and anger against himself. Still, how could it be helped?

They were met in the hall by Nurse Binns, and the fact of her being there at so late an hour was disturbing. She looked at Monica, and asked if she might speak to her at once. Something had happened, she said, which needed immediate attention, and when Lorrimer asked her if she could speak openly if he was also present, she agreed with a sour smile.

"Certainly, Colonel Lorrimer," she said, and they went together into the dining-room, where the table was laid and a late supper prepared.

Nurse Binns stood, and Monica sat; Lorrimer took up his place by the mantelpiece, over which a portrait of Cathy hung, smiling and full of her wayward charm.

Nurse Binns spoke in hard, direct tones, and informed

Doctor Henstock that, during the time when Miss Batten had taken charge of Mrs. Lorrimer, a very unpleasant incident had occurred. Miss Batten would tell Nurse Binns nothing whatever; but, either with or without her consent, Mrs. Lorrimer had left her room and gone into the garden.

Monica flushed and frowned; she was accustomed to obedience from her patients, and she was angry with Cathy.

"She will certainly have a relapse," she remarked, and told Nurse Binns to continue her report.

Clearing her throat sharply, Nurse Binns went on with her story. She had seen from her window the figure of a stranger in the garden; a man who walked rapidly, and then stood under Mrs. Lorrimer's window and appeared to be speaking to her. A little later, Mrs. Lorrimer came into the garden. Her hair had tumbled down, and she looked wild and excited. For some time she walked about arm-in-arm with the strange man, who gave her a paper or a book, and, at last, Nurse Binns could bear it no longer, and came down the staircase to call Mrs. Lorrimer back to a sense of duty.

"That is to say, if it was possible," she added bitterly.

"Either," she said in conclusion, "I must ask to be released from my duty here, or I must have proper control. I am fully convinced that, without supervision, Mrs. Lorrimer will become a danger to herself."

Monica looked at Nurse Binns and then at Lorrimer, whose face was set and angry. He had felt considerably ashamed of himself when he thought of Cathy, and Cathy's trust in him, and it re-established himself in his own esteem to believe that Cathy had deliberately deceived him. He had a right to be an angry man rather than a penitent, and he made an exclamation of disgust as he turned away, looking into the fireless grate. Somewhere in his heart a red anger towards her and Barlow began to smoulder, and yet he could not discuss that with Nurse Binns in the room.

Directly his back was turned Cathy had begun again, and it looked as though she had arranged the meeting with Barlow to coincide with the afternoon when Miss Batten was in charge of her. Miss Batten's lack of loyalty hit him like a blow, and he felt that there, at least, he could assert his power. The poor, weak creature was very much at his mercy, and she should be made to pay. Monica was talking to Nurse Binns in steady, measured tones, asking questions and forcing Nurse Binns to admissions which, it appeared, she had not made before.

Nurse Binns stuck to her guns and became more definite. Lorrimer heard her say that she regarded Cathy as a mental case, and that the truth of her convictions would certainly be justified if Mrs. Lorrimer was given any liberty.

"She should, in my opinion, be under temporary restraint," she said; "she is capable of violent action. I have no authority, and I can't be held responsible."

At last she left the room, and they were alone. Lorrimer turned and flickered his eyelids, looking sideways at Monica. He was distressed and agitated, and the confidence with which Nurse Binns had asserted her belief that Cathy was out of her reason was both hideous and alarming to him.

"What do you make of it?" he asked, as he sat down.

"I hardly like to say," Monica's face was pale and she looked strangely at Lorrimer. "How *can* I say it, Jack? In the case of mental disorder it is so difficult for a doctor to be sure of anything, and we are used to Cathy's ways."

"That nurse suggested that she is mad," he said bluntly. "Can you not tell me what you think?"

"Cathy has always been excitable," Monica avoided looking at him, "but it is ridiculous to say that she is mad. There are enormous differences between the conditions. . . . I have felt that a complete rest would secure her return to a more normal state of mind. Yet she goes dead against us." She paused again. "I think we had better get Miss Batten down and find out the truth from her."

CHAPTER XV

When Batkins received a summons to go down to the dining-room, her knees trembled, and she felt as though she had pulses beating in every vein of her small body. If she could see Lorrimer alone, she told herself, it would all be quite easy to explain, but there was something about Monica which made explanations very difficult, unless they coincided with her own views.

She looked scared and frightened as she stood in the doorway. Lorrimer was looking into the fire, and Monica, who had been standing close to him, turned, as Miss Batten's fluttering knock sounded, and smiled at her with an entirely un-encouraging smile. She looked towards Lorrimer for his usual kindly word, but he neither turned nor spoke.

"Sit down, Miss Batten," Monica said in her professional tone. "We must get at the truth of what has happened this afternoon. Nurse Binns reports that you allowed Mrs. Lorrimer to go out." She toyed with a pencil as she spoke. "I need not tell you that it was taking a very grave responsibility upon yourself." She raised her eyes and looked at Miss Batten firmly. "Did you not try to interfere with this sudden impulse?"

"Mrs. Lorrimer wanted to go out," Batkins said lamely. "The day was so fine that I thought——"

Monica made a stifled sound of contempt, and Miss Batten's nerves jumped violently.

"Mrs. Lorrimer saw a friend of hers in the garden?"

"Yes," Batkins' voice sounded thin and reluctant.

"Knowing the danger, you agreed to let her go out?"

Miss Batten looked helplessly around her. She seemed to be compassed about with invisible foes, and she wished desperately that Lorrimer would turn and speak. He would be kind and he would understand.

"I did reason with her," she admitted, and her eyes grew vague.

"You should have stood between her and the door," Doctor Henstock said impatiently. "Really, Miss Batten, you seem to be quite incapable of understanding what responsibility means."

Batkins flushed painfully, and she fiddled with the lace edge of a small mat, which lay, island-like, on the polished table. To suffer for Cathy was in itself a kind of glory, only that it put one, somehow, at odds with everything, Lorrimer included. She had made no reply to Monica, when Lorrimer moved heavily and turned towards her. "I am sure you did what you could," he said, and his voice was intensely unhappy.

He stood behind Doctor Henstock's chair and put his hand on it; yet, so far, Batkins did not entirely regard them as allies. She looked up gratefully, and spoke with less constraint.

"Indeed I did, Colonel Lorrimer, only you know how hard it is to refuse Mrs. Lorrimer anything. For a little we were quite undisturbed, and then a friend—some one she knew——"

"A fellow called Barlow," Lorrimer said, and he looked down at Monica as he spoke.

"He came and called to Mrs. Lorrimer, and she felt that she would like to speak to him. There was no harm in it, I thought——"

She broke off again. It was difficult to let Lorrimer think that she had done nothing to guard his treasure from harm or danger.

"I am sure that you are not telling us everything," Lorrimer raised his eyes dully. "Could you not be more frank?"

"Yes, I think a little more regard to facts would help," Monica said shortly. "And, in any case, Miss Batten, it is no use. I shall get the facts from Mrs. Lorrimer in the morning."

"Are you trying to hide something?" Lorimer asked in the same dull, disgusted voice.

"I did try to stop her," Batkins grew desperate. Cathy would tell the story, that was certain. Tell it, too, with all the vivid exaggeration of a good *raconteuse*. It was better that these two who fronted her should have the facts as they were. "Perhaps," she went on, rallying her courage, "Nurse Binns made too much of it all. I know she was angry because I took her place to-day. I ran to the door, and Mrs. Lorrimer said that she was twice as strong as I am, even though she was an invalid, and she just lifted me out of the way. It was a joke . . . the whole thing was only a piece of fun, Colonel Lorrimer, and we laughed all the time."

Miss Batten clasped and unclasped her hands, and looked the picture of misery. The "joke" was a thing of the past.

"Thank you, I don't think I need keep you any longer," Monica said frigidly, and Miss Batten rose to her feet, a wave of hysterical emotion sweeping over her.

"I can't go, feeling that I haven't convinced you," she said, ignoring Monica and speaking directly to Lorrimer; "it isn't fair to Mrs. Lorrimer. Don't listen to anyone." She breathed hard, and her eyes filled with tears. "Don't let them persuade you that there was something wrong in what Mrs. Lorrimer did. They will make trouble between you and her and——"

Monica crossed the floor, and took her by the arm, leading her to the door. She was still outwardly kind, but Miss Batten felt that she was inwardly royally angry with her.

"You have said more than you meant to," she said, and then the hand which held Miss Batten's thin arm tightened its grasp. The sleeve, which was a short one, had been pulled upwards by the guiding hand of Doctor Henstock, and her glance had fallen on the exposed wrist. She did not let Miss Batten go, and speaking over her shoulder in the same level tone, she addressed Lorrimer.

"Jack, come here for a moment, will you? Both wrists, please, Miss Batten; it is no use trying to hide them."

"The least thing bruises me," Batkins spoke urgently; "I shall have a bruised arm in the morning where you held me just now; anything does it——"

"Look there and there," Monica went on, indifferent to

Miss Batten's repeated assertions. "I think that is pretty conclusive."

Lorrimer stood sulkily looking at the faint blue marks, and said nothing, either good or bad; Monica patted Miss Batten on the shoulder.

"I thought you were more to be trusted than you wanted us to believe," she said, with sudden friendliness; and at that Batkins burst into unrestrained sobbing and left the room with bowed head.

When she had gone, Monica went back to her chair and took up her heavy silver pencil. She made some vague designs on the mat in front of her, and looked preoccupied and troubled.

"It is worse than I thought," she said at last, without looking up at Lorrimer, who was pacing the room slowly, his head bent and his eyes on the floor. "It looks to me, now, as though Nurse Binns had hardly exaggerated."

Lorrimer came to a standstill before her.

"For God's sake, explain it," he said. "Has she actually allowed herself to attack this wretched creature?"

"Of course, Miss Batten may bruise very easily," Monica said, ignoring his demand.

"That is not the point. Do you believe that Cathy is so madly keen on this blackguard Barlow that she allows herself to—oh, it's preposterous!"

Monica got up impulsively and laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't make any rash judgments," she said persuasively. "Cathy is incapable of such an act, unless she was not really and truly herself. To begin with, she is absolutely straight——"

"Yet this is the second time she has shown that so long as she gets to Barlow she will risk anything. She killed my love for her that other time, and now she has murdered my confidence." He shook off Monica's hand. "You'll stick up for her, and you are trying to explain it by calling it 'nerves.' Nerves be damned!" He flung away, back to his angry pacing. "It's the eternal excuse. If she goes on like this the thing is bound to be known. Only yesterday Hammersly warned me that there were rumours about, and that people had got hold of something. My wife mixed up in a scandal with Barlow. God! it's enough to make the devils laugh."

He was in one of his melodramatic moods, and Monica knew that she must let him rage through it to the end.

"Why did I ever marry her?" he went on. "Why did I? How many decent fellows have asked themselves that question at the end of a couple of years?"

"I tell you Cathy is not to blame. You don't understand," Monica said persistently, and then he weakened suddenly and knelt beside her.

"Why didn't I marry you?" he asked. "Was I mad?"

"You were in love," she said, the strain of the interview showing in her eyes, "and Cathy dazzled you. It was hardly strange. Beside her, I am a very ordinary kind of woman."

"And now, where are we?"

He put his hands on hers, and they felt hot and dry.

"We must not think of that," she said, "it does no good. The real question is what we can do for Cathy. Promise me that you won't say anything to her about all this. Leave it to me."

He got up clumsily, and put his hands in his pockets.

"I'll do my best," he said, "but, after all, I am only human. You see, we don't agree as to the conditions that exist."

"I don't mean to argue it over with you again," Monica said, taking up her coat. "If you are right, knowing Cathy as I do, she will tell you that she cares for Barlow and intends to go to him. She doesn't care a rap for public opinion. If I am right, and it is nerves, and Cathy isn't really herself, there will be some other indication in the course of a day or two."

She left him in the dining-room and walked wearily up the wide staircase to bed.

Cathy awoke with a fine sense of exhilaration. She lay cuddled up against her pillows, and the idea of yet another day in captivity appeared monstrous and absurd. What use was it to be alive unless one did some living? She thought of Jack, and decided that he must really be cajoled into common sense. She intended to tell him the whole episode of the previous day, and to prove by plain facts that her outing had only done her good. The door opened softly, and Nurse Binns came gliding into the room.

"I don't want you," Cathy said, sitting up. "There is no use our wasting time on polite fictions, nurse. I shall get up now, as soon as you are gone, and you need not come back. Flora will bring me my breakfast, and after that I shall see Colonel Lorrimer."

Nurse Binns appeared to consider for a moment.

"If you prefer that I should remain in the sitting-room while you dress?" she said, with something approaching an effort at conciliation.

"I do prefer it." Cathy clasped her hands round her knees. "I'm sure, if I met you anywhere else, Nurse Binns, I should like you, but, as my own special prison warder, I can't say I do."

Nurse Binns withdrew silently, and Cathy slid out of bed. There were no hairpins anywhere to be found, so she twisted up her thick plaits and tied them with a gold ribbon. It was hateful to be everlastingly shadowed by these people, who belonged to death rather than life, and who all knew so much about corpses.

To her relief, her sitting-room was empty, and her breakfast had been laid for her on a table near the window. There were no letters, of course, and no paper. Time stood still, and a wall of silence divided her from the interests of the day's beginning.

With nothing to read and nothing to do, the time is apt to drag, and Cathy sat down on her wide sofa and began to pull the heavy silk cord off one of the many large cushions. She felt that it would be rather amusing to empty the contents over Monica, if she ripped the whole side open. Mug would be so angry, and would look so unlike herself with feathers all over her head.

At last she heard the key turn, and Nurse Binns opened the door for Flora, one of the upper housemaids, to clear away Mrs. Lorrimer's breakfast.

"I wish I was you, Flora," Cathy said, putting her feet up on the sofa. "How is everyone this morning? How is Miss Batten?"

Flora replied that Miss Batten was going away, and the news startled Cathy into astonished speech.

"But going away? Surely not. Where to?"

Flora knew nothing whatever of Miss Batten's plans. All she had heard came to her through Jakes, the chauffeur. He had been told that he was to take Miss Batten to the ten-twenty to London, and she was at that moment packing her things.

"Tell her to come to me at once," Cathy said; "I must see her."

Flora disappeared, her round face full of wonder and distress. There was a general feeling in the servants' hall at Kingslade that Mrs. Lorrimer was being badly treated. Servants always adored Cathy and disliked Monica, and they resented some touch of proprietorship in Doctor Henstock's manner. The whole situation was charged with mystery, and now the sudden departure of Miss Batten added to the growing impression of unrest.

Left alone, Cathy began to walk about the room. For the first time since she had been convalescent she began to feel a queer touch of alarm. She felt as though power was slipping from her, and she concluded at once that Batkins was being evicted because of her own action the previous afternoon. She would stop it, it was too abominably unjust. Directly Flora had left the room the key had been turned in the door, and Cathy concluded that Nurse Binns was now on guard outside.

She watched the clock anxiously. There had been plenty of time for Batkins to have come, and yet she did not come. After about half an hour had dragged through, the door was unlocked again and Lorrimer came in. His face looked drawn and heavy and his eyes were cold. He did not kiss her, and stood at the window, and Cathy remained by the sofa, watching him. She felt desperately sorry for him, seeing him so troubled, and her anger died away.

"Jack," she said, "what *is* the matter? Do let us clear up this horrible mystery. Why is Miss Batten leaving?"

"I think we had better not discuss it," he said, speaking carefully. "You are not to excite yourself."

Cathy laughed. It was so ridiculous to deal with her in that way, but she did not lose her temper.

"Can't we have free speech?" she said, coming to him and putting her hands on his shoulders. "Is Batkins being sacrificed to Monica? I know Mug is probably very angry with her, yet none of it was her fault. Open the door and let us go down together, and I'll explain everything."

Lorrimer took her hands and held them hard. She always put a kind of spell upon him, and it was torture to think that she was utterly false. He did not intend to speak of Barlow, but his wounded self-esteem hurt desperately. Cathy was playing with him, cajoling him, laughing at the weak fool in her heart. She was not suffering from nerves, that was merely the usual feminine fiction produced by one woman to shelter another. Even though Monica loved him, she was true to the free-masonry of her sex, and she sought excuses for Cathy.

"I was a bad child," Cathy went on; "I broke rules and ran into the garden. Bat held the bridge like Horatius, and was most gallant, but I simply pulled her out of the way." Her face was full of laughter at the recollection. "I believe I bruised her wrists, but I had to go out. . . ."

"Oh, *had* to?" Lorrimer dropped her hands and stood unresponsively beside her.

"Yes, because Major Barlow said he must speak to me." Cathy ceased to smile, and her eyes grew earnest. "Do you know that they are saying hateful things of you, Jack? I see no papers up here, and it was news to me."

"It doesn't interest me particularly," he said drily. "No doubt you have found your own way of excusing yourself."

She drew back, and her sensitive face flushed. Jack was trying to be downright rude to her, and she walked from him and sat down on the sofa. Yet this was not the moment for paltry personal dispute, and again she caught back her sense of proportion.

"I think it is better to know things," she said thoughtfully. "People say you have gone back on your pledges; that you are dishonest."

It was not easy to say it, but Cathy felt the truth must be stated in blunt, ugly terms.

Lorrimer's face grew a dusky red, and he looked at her with unveiled hostility.

"Anything I have done will bear daylight," he said, raising his voice slightly; and then he remembered that, where Monica was concerned, this was hardly the fact. The knowledge stung him and added to his anger. If he had strayed from the way of honest dealing, who was Cathy to reproach him? "Understand," he went on more rapidly, "I have so far kept from saying anything likely to upset you, as Monica says your nerves are in a bad state, but there are things which will have to be said between us, sooner or later."

"Why not now?" Cathy asked quietly.

"Your nerves," he replied, and the word sounded like a taunt.

"We seem to have got into a strange place," she said in the same quiet voice. "Is this really us, Jack?"

"I have considered you in everything," he continued, working himself up into a dull passion of anger. "When you threw away all our hopes, so that you could creep out the instant my back was turned to meet Barlow, I did not reproach you."

Cathy's eyes grew wide and she stared at him blindly.

"So *that* is what you thought?" she said, in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"I tried to be patient with you, and I tried to believe that it was all some damnable mistake. Now, again, you have done the same thing. Barlow comes whistling to you under the window and you run, like a dog to its master. The poor creature who was in charge of you, even by your own account, tried to keep you back, and you used your hands to make your way clear. God! it's a pretty affair altogether. As you are concerned about the truth of my political views and interested in my career, you had better know that it is a common report that you are trafficking with the Danielli crowd. That is a little thing to me," he turned away; "it is all the rest that is so vile."

Cathy had listened without moving from where she sat. If Lorrimer had hit her across the face she could not have felt more hopelessly astonished and affronted. For weeks he had cherished these feelings, and he had believed her to be leagued with Barlow against him. Worse than this, he had actually accused her of the most vulgar and sordid intrigue. She felt a sudden touch of giddiness and put her hands over her face.

"I don't wonder that you are ashamed," he said savagely.

He had exploded the fiction of "nerves," and, having let himself go, he felt like continuing to punish her. There was a joy in it, too, for she was obviously crushed and beaten, and he felt a renewal of self-esteem.

Cathy removed her hands and stood up.

"Is it any use my saying that all you have said is untrue?" she said, looping the torn cord of the cushion round her fingers. "I don't know that it is. There are times when even to defend oneself seems impossible. If you really believe all you say, it ends things. That is how it looks to me."

"Ends things?" Lorrimer laughed. "*Ends* them? Not quite that. You happen to be my wife."

"I don't feel as if I am." Cathy gave a ghost of a smile. "No, I really am Cathy Rossiter still, except that you have been able to speak to me as you would hardly have dared to speak to her."

"I thought you might not altogether appreciate the truth, though you professed to be so fond of it," he said roughly. "Anyhow, we know how we stand."

Cathy said nothing. She had not denied any of the charges he had made. He saw that she was going to speak again, and he waited, half hoping that she might plead. In the end, if she pleaded, he would bring himself to forgiveness, but there were all those bitter words lying like an ocean between them.

"How much longer do I remain a prisoner?" she asked, and he stared at her with his heavy eyes.

"I asked you how much longer I am to remain a prisoner?" she repeated. "As you admit that I am well in health, am I here under lock and key to prevent my meeting Major Barlow?"

"I have nothing to say to it," he looked towards the door, "Monica considers it necessary."

"And does Monica hold your views on the other question?"

"No, she doesn't." He spoke as though he was uttering a threat. "She is——" He was going to say "too honest herself," and his memories smote him.

Monica had admitted that she loved him, admitted it first with slow, painful tears. There was nothing light and easy in their poor, belated romance. Set beside Cathy's treachery, it was pure as snow.

"Then, if you will send Monica to me, I shall tell her that I am leaving here with Miss Batten. Surely Miss Batten's departure can be delayed a little?"

When Lorrimer came in the door had not been locked, and, as Cathy spoke, it opened and Monica herself appeared in the doorway, and she glanced at Lorrimer. There was no doubt that she summed up the situation at once, and she signed to him to leave.

"Muggins," Cathy's voice was charged with feeling, "Muggins."

Lorrimer looked back from the door, and saw Cathy hold out both her hands to her friend.

CHAPTER XVI

LORRIMER watched the car take Miss Batten down the drive, and wandered wretchedly about his smoking-room waiting for Monica to reappear. He was likely to be in for a row with Doctor Henstock, and yet, given that the plea of nerves was an excuse, he felt he had been moderate.

At last Monica came. She came very quietly, and her face was grave.

"I have done what I can to quiet her," she said, "but you have upset the work of weeks. She wanted to break away at once, and you must see for yourself that it would only mean disaster. If there was that sort of scandal about you—oh, Jack, it must not be." She was cruelly anxious and her anxiety became catching. "Her people are very powerful, and then, if, as well as her people, you had the Danielli group saying that you had driven her out, it would ruin you."

"I don't believe there is anything the matter with her," he said doggedly.

The truth of her words had taken effect, and Lorrimer became more subdued in manner.

"I told her that she might go in two days from now," Monica went on, "and, as I know Cathy, it will take you all your time to persuade her out of her resolution. She wanted to wire to Robert Amyas, and I have the wire here, but, of course, shall not send it."

She handed the telegraph form to Lorrimer, who tore it in fragments, and then threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"I know it was dreadfully hard for you," she said, "but you blundered hopelessly. It isn't the least use your seeing her again to-day. To-morrow she may be better."

Lorrimer sat down heavily; he was profoundly distressed.

"She denied nothing," he said.

"Did you expect her to? I don't believe in the idea you have got hold of," Monica replied; "Cathy is not like that. She gets all sorts of notions into her head, and she has always been lacking in balance."

"If she is locked into her room she can't very well meet Barlow or Amyas," Lorrimer said, and there was a sound of satisfaction in his voice.

"You can't keep her locked up for ever, and I have promised her that in two days she will be free." Monica frowned slightly. "Of course, if Nurse Binns is right, Cathy may easily show some definite sign of——" She stopped on the word, and went on smoothly. "We need hardly fear that, however. What you must do—you *must,* Jack—is to make your peace with Cathy, and take her away for a bit." She looked plain and unhappy as she spoke. "It will be best for both of you in the long run."

Lorrimer took up his hat from the table.

"I shall clear out to London until to-morrow," he said, squaring his elbows. "It's not much good my hangin' round here. If I have to come to apologise for speaking the truth, I suppose I shall have to, but I must be in the House tonight."

They parted very formally, and Monica watched him go, through cold, troubled tears. He was so infinitely dear to her, and now, Cathy and he together were wrecking life and reputation with ruthless disregard for both. Her own nerves were on edge, and she stood in a very difficult situation towards both the man she loved and the woman who believed her to be her friend.

The day dragged through comfortlessly, and at tea-time, when she had again told Cathy that her term of imprisonment was surely drawing to its close, she went downstairs and sat in the wide drawing-room by the open window, where tea was laid out on a small table.

Why could not she and Jack be happy together, and let Cathy go? Open the window and allow the bird of strange plumage to escape?

If only Cathy could really fly away and depart as though she had never existed! Her own desire for flight was strong, but Monica, even if she longed for it, was bound to do all she could to counter any such act. Her position was certainly a cruel one, and she thought over what Nurse Binns had said of Cathy's mental state. But there was nothing to go upon there. Monica sighed as she stirred her tea.

You could always have described Cathy as eccentric, but that was part of her charm. Plenty of people were eccentric, but there was nothing tangible to go upon. Again Monica sighed. She was permitting herself to think thoughts which she well knew to be futile and dangerous.

She was interrupted in her musings by the arrival of Hammersly. He came in upon her from the garden, and stood smiling at her through the long window, dressed in his town clothes, and wearing a flower in his buttonhole. Hammersly was always slightly scented, and a delicate aroma of verbena was wafted towards Doctor Henstock.

"Am I intruding?" he asked in his liquid, pleasant voice. "I saw Lorrimer in London, and, being rather worried about him, I felt I must come to you."

The implied compliment made Monica flush slightly, and she asked Hammersly to come in and have some tea.

He settled himself in an easy chair, and Monica began to feel that there was something wonderfully persuasive about the man. He had come upon her at a moment when she was finding herself too weak to battle with the complexities of life.

"And how is the interesting invalid?" he asked, "Jack Lorrimer's disaster."

"Oh, I think she is getting on," Monica said composedly. "Besides, you know that I don't allow you to call her that."

"Yet I do call her that," he replied, and he laughed his wonderfully worldly laugh which seemed to place heaven and hell at a long distance from the green planet. "Let us be honest with each other, Doctor Henstock. We both know perfectly well that Lorrimer won't go an inch—not one inch," he measured it on his little finger, "if his wife can stop him. I positively dread her return to health and sanity, if she may ever be regarded as really sane."

"I am afraid there has been trouble," Monica said, after a pause.

To relieve her mind by talking things over with Hammersly was a temptation too strong to be resisted.

"So I gathered," he said, nodding. "I hear that friend Barlow has been on the war-path. I am not a Puritan," he smiled again, "but Barlow sticks in my throat. It is hardly astonishing that Lorrimer kicks. I'd kick myself, if I were in his place."

"Cathy means nothing by it," Monica said, but without heart.

She was always defending Cathy, and she was growing to wonder whether she was right or wrong. Women were secretive towards one another in these matters, and, quite possibly, Cathy might really go further in her friendships with men than she admitted.

Hammersly waved his hand, and replaced his cup on the table.

"I admit your greater knowledge of Mrs. Lorrimer, but I do not admit any mistake, from the world's angle. Seen from the common, vulgar standpoint, Mrs. Lorrimer's philanderings have only one explanation, and that is the least pleasant one for her husband. Servants talk, my dear Doctor Henstock, and though no well-bred person listens to what servants say, there are a quantity of ill-bred people out and about, who are not so particular. It is all over Kingslade at this moment that Barlow was trespassing in the garden, and that Mrs. Lorrimer was out and met him there. There are other details, embroideries no doubt, added to this. The young and romantic under-gardener is responsible for them."

Monica drew a deep breath. She was genuinely worried, and she saw her fears arise like an armed force.

"What can be done?" she asked desperately.

Hammersly shrugged his shoulders.

"There was a row, wasn't there?" he asked.

"Unfortunately."

"Mrs. Lorrimer is hopelessly undependable," he said musingly. "If she has a grievance against Lorrimer she will stick to it. What was your advice?"

"Peace, peace at any price," said Monica.

Hammersly looked at her steadily. He had a great deal of power in his eyes, which were never shifty but always direct, even when he was lying.

"Do you not know the ultimate result of 'Peace at any price'?" he asked. "It spells bankruptcy. Any price is prohibitive. You did not advise well, Doctor Henstock."

"There is the danger to Jack's reputation," she said, placing her own points before him as they came. "Among the people he must count on working with, the fact of any kind of scandal connected with Cathy would be simply damning."

"Agreed," said Hammersly briefly.

"Then, as one knows—certainly as I know in my professional capacity—there are times when most married people come to a point that runs close to disaster. If it is fended off, it very often works out all right."

"With the average woman, yes, but Mrs. Lorrimer——" Hammersly made a quick, expressive gesture with his flexible hands. "I think myself that no amount of patching will make your peace a durable one. How far did you get, in any case?"

"I got Jack to agree to making an apology, and I quieted her by promising that there is to be an end of my treatment in two days. I am simply giving up the case."

"Then there's not much done just yet?"

Monica bowed her head dejectedly.

"It is a bad predicament," he said, after a pause. "I don't know how you may regard friendships, Doctor Henstock, but I feel that my own adherence is towards Lorrimer. Beyond being a thoroughly good fellow, he is a man who can go a long way, provided he has guidance. Since Mrs. Lorrimer's influence has lessened, his chances have grown appreciably."

"Well, they are married, and there is no way out."

Monica's words were heavy with finality.

"There generally is a way," Hammersly narrowed his eyes; "I don't exactly see it in this connection, yet it must be there. Am I keeping you?"

"No," Monica said, and she spoke eagerly. She did not want Hammersly to leave. He was comforting to her in her miserable mood of depression.

"Keep her where she is, Doctor Henstock. Muzzle her, do anything you can, only don't clear out just when it's all so important."

"I have promised to let her do as she likes in two days, and I can't go back on it," Monica said firmly. "I told you already that I shall give up the case. My own holiday"—she laughed mirthlessly—"if one can call it such a thing, is over, and I have to go back to my work then, anyhow."

"Couldn't you get a few days longer?"

"If it were a case of life and death, but only in such a case."

Hammersly got up and stood looking out into the garden.

"In every event of life there is always the gambling chance," he said, jingling some loose money in his pockets. "I've backed Lorrimer, and I don't intend to let him down."

Monica turned her head sharply.

"Do you accuse me of letting him down?" she asked.

"Not at all, only I want you to see the thing as a whole, not in bits. If, for instance, there is any chance of your being able to use any influence over Mrs. Lorrimer, I think you should use it—and use it ruthlessly." He turned and faced her again. "I always imagine, though she is your friend, that Lorrimer has also a claim upon you."

"I knew him ages ago," Monica said, and she dropped her eyes. There was something a little too definite about Hammersly's eyes and it did not please her. "We were old friends, and it was at my house that he first met Cathy."

"Then his mortgage is a long-standing one." Hammersly smiled at her bent head. "All I want you to bear in mind now is, that you must not let any sense of bias make you deliberately act for her when you might best befriend him."

"Bias? I don't follow you."

Monica's voice was lowered, and she did not look up.

"Any feeling that because he is a man and she is a woman, you must assist the weaker of the two. Mrs. Lorrimer is not really weak, and she has a world full of allies. She has only to go out and smile at people, and she knocks them over like ninepins. Lorrimer has none of her arts, and he is an exceptionally lonely human creature."

"You seem to place so much responsibility on my shoulders," Monica looked up at last. "It isn't fair to me. I am in a most difficult situation as it is."

"I wish I could help you," he said, and his voice sounded admirably sincere. "If ever I can, you know that you may count upon me to the utmost. Words are easy, we both know that, but I mean all I say."

He left her, taking her hand and holding it for a second, and Monica leaned back in her chair, alone once more with her thoughts.

Hammersly wanted time, but she could not give it. She was pledged to Cathy, unless, of course, something entirely unforeseen occurred. Cathy was to be free of her ministrations and was fully prepared to go back to Lady Carstairs pending some kind of legal separation from Lorrimer. Time! How could one make time? Cathy had raged gloriously before she had finished. That Lorrimer had coupled her name with that of Barlow was in itself an unforgivable affront; and, blameless as she was, to be accused by the man she had fully trusted, was to be swept clear away from the safe harbour where she had anchored.

Hammersly had been so persistent. He seemed to regard Monica as a kind of all-powerful being who might intervene to help. She sat with her hands palms upwards on her knees, in an attitude of defeat towards the cumulative forces ranged against her.

Alone in her own room, Cathy had passed through all the circles which lead to the dry, arid places where no comfort can be found. She had not cried, but her eyes were strained and lacked their usual light. The one feeling which dominated every other sensation was that of amazement mixed with dismay. Life had spoilt her quite consistently, and she had never before come face to face with the cruelty of the individual. Her freedom had been curtailed, it was true, but she knew that Monica had acted for her own good. Muggins had been extraordinarily kind that very morning, and had comforted her. She had been fair, also, and when Cathy told her that she would bear no more of the tedious treatment which Doctor Henstock felt to be necessary, instead of taking offence, Monica was quite sympathetic, and had explained to Cathy that, if ill came of it, she must inevitably feel greatly to blame. Muggins had been like the old Muggins of long ago, and had told Cathy quietly that she was ready to accept defeat quite reasonably. All she asked in return was that Cathy should finish the present course of treatment, a matter of two days only. Monica was to summon Doctor Carthew from London to see her patient when she herself gave up the case. Doctor Carthew was an extremely popular physician, who advised people to do as they liked, and Muggins made a wry face, and remarked that all Cathy need do was to look her best and appear cheerful.

"Put on your glad rags, Cath, and hypnotise Carthew. He will let you have your own way, and I am absolved, though I still firmly believe——"

Cathy had put her hand over Monica's mouth and stopped further argument on the subject.

All this was splendid, so far as Cathy was concerned, and had there been the wonderful old world to go into—but the old world had fallen to pieces and there were those hot, red memories of anger to traverse, and the recollection of Lorrimer's words and the look in Lorrimer's eyes. He had divested himself of all illusion, and Cathy sat crouched in the corner of the sofa, thinking it all over. She would go back to the old friends, the men and women she knew, who had loved her so faithfully. Twyford, with his steady, dependable sincerity, a man who knew what people really were, and who did not need to be told things. He would not so much as ask a question of Cathy. Either he believed in people and concluded that the reasons they had for their actions were valid ones, or he didn't believe in them at any time. Robert Amyas, with his weaknesses, obvious and clear enough, but with his fastidious nature and his quick comprehension. She longed to be home again, and to escape from the battered sense of having been outraged and attacked, plastered with mud and affronted beyond bearing.

Monica had spoken of Lorrimer's career, and though she had done so out of a good heart, Cathy grew rigid at the word. It was this perpetual desire to climb which she hated more than anything else, and the argument was useless in her case. Lorrimer's career was more to him than his honesty; he had spoken himself of the possibility of her doing him political damage, and Cathy, who was never very fair at any time, was less so than usual towards her husband's aspirations. He was veering with every wind, and trimming his sails carefully. That alone would have made things difficult between them. Added to this, there was his other action—unbelievably gross in her eyes.

It was desperately important that she should look well when Doctor Carthew came to see her, and as dusk began to draw fine veils over the evening sky Cathy grew anxious about herself. If Doctor Carthew gave her even a day longer of incarceration she felt she might do almost anything. Tear her sheets up and let herself out by the window. Anything at all so that she could escape. The longing to be away, out of Kingslade and anywhere else, strengthened with the ticking of the clock. Janey Greenaway's flat would be Paradise by comparison, and Janey would not be a foe. She would give her tea to drink, and treat the whole matter as being merely one of the ordinary events of life. The "Danielli crowd" lived a cinema existence normally, and nothing was strange or amazing to them. Still, it would be better to go away without having to resort to such methods.

Opening the door of communication between her sitting-room and bedroom, she went in and sat down before her dressing-table. Her nail scissors were removed, and her food had been sent to her that day without any knife on the tray. Nurse Binns had told her that it was to "save her effort," and Cathy, under the stress of other emotions, had forgotten to speak of it to Monica.

In the dimness of the room her own reflection looked ghostly and wistful, and the whole full sense of trouble and isolation swept across her, making her eyelids smart with unshed tears. Where was poor Batkins, she thought. She must find her directly she got back to London, and do something to help her. Batkins was being held responsible for what had been no earthly fault of hers.

It became too dark to see very well, and she turned on the light over the mirror and again caught sight of her own face. She was showing the wear and tear of the emotional day only too plainly, for Cathy had the type of face which "pities itself," and already she was very pale, and there were heavy lines around her eyes.

"I shall look a holy show if I don't sleep," she thought desperately, and the palms of her hands grew moist. She was afraid to think of any possibility of failure, and she got up and walked to her bed. Nurse Binns had been into her room a little while before, and Cathy saw a thermometer and a small glass tube lying on the gorgeous silk quilt. Nurse Binns had evidently forgotten some of the hateful paraphernalia of her calling, and Cathy took up the tube and looked at it carefully. It was full of flat, white tablets, one upon another, and there was a wad of cotton-wool and a small cork in the top. On a slip of paper gummed on the side she read the printed words, "To be taken when sleep is required," and nothing further. Opening the tube she let the waferlike contents fall into the palm of her hand. These simple little things would make her sleep, and if she could sleep she need fear nothing. The question was, how many she could safely take? Cathy was reckless towards quantities, and her lack of mental exactitude made her indifferent to risk. If she took only enough to make her wake at midnight she would be an even more wretched Cathy next day. She poured herself out a glass of water. Nurse Binns would be upon her at any minute, and she had not time for long consideration. Would three do? She swallowed them down quickly. Then, if they didn't? A noise in the corridor made her start and sent her heart beating rapidly. Better take five, and be on the right side. She gulped down a mouthful of water. It was done now, anyhow, and she need not fear the dragging eternity of the night hours.

Walking to the window, she dropped the small tube into a bed of irises below, and, as she did so, Nurse Binns came into the room, hastened her footsteps, and caught her by both arms.

Cathy drew back, and, shaking free, regarded Nurse Binns with a look of astonishment.

"What do you think you are doing?" she asked. "Are you mad?"

"I thought for a moment that you might fall," Nurse Binns replied, and they stood facing one another.

"Only two more days," Cathy said to herself, "and it must *not* be more than that."

It quieted her, and she gave herself up to the inevitable and deadly process of being washed and brushed and put to bed before nine o'clock.

CHAPTER XVII

Lorrimer was staying at his club, and on the whole he was feeling considerably better.

It was true that he had been brooding angrily for weeks, and nursing his wrath against Cathy, but the actual quarrel when thought had burst into speech was sharp and sudden. It was even possible to forget it, and Lorrimer had dined a few friends very successfully the previous night. He was on quite good terms with himself when he went to bed, but the morning brought with it a recall to the dreary facts which faced him. He was actively disturbed at the prospect of any open break between them, and it made him nervous and jumpy. Any normally-minded woman made nothing of a row, and it was ridiculous of Cathy to get on stilts and talk of clearing out. The awkward part of the problem was that Monica seemed so certain Cathy actually meant all she said.

As he ate his breakfast he came to the conclusion that he could not afford a public scandal, and he humped his heavy shoulders and decided to climb down. The previous night Barlow and some malcontents had tried to make a noise in the House, Barlow and the usual following of shrieking women, but they had been ejected, and that had done Lorrimer quite a lot of good. He had not a forgiving disposition, and he owed Barlow one, a debt he fully intended to pay.

Lorrimer had finished breakfast, and was reading the paper when he heard one of the pages who lived a sprite-like existence of highly sophisticated energy at his club, calling his name, and he turned and signed to the carrot-headed urchin, telling him at the same time not to make so much noise. He was wanted on the telephone, and getting up, he walked through the hall and into one of the boxes in a vestibule at the back. He had no premonition of any sort as he lifted the receiver and grunted the usual curt "Hullo"; but his face altered quickly, and his hand began to shake. Monica was speaking, and she talked rapidly. Cathy, the wild, reckless woman he had married, had attempted to take her life, and very nearly succeeded. The broken sentences came to him, and a cockney voice broke in, asking him some perfectly inconsequent question. Nurse Binns had found her at the window the evening before, and had just stopped her throwing herself out. Had she administered the usual opiate Cathy would now be dead.

Lorrimer listened like a man bemused. It was so utterly unexpected, for, of all things, Cathy loved life, and for her to choose quite suddenly to end it was wholly incomprehensible.

Monica assured him that there was now no danger. She had saved the situation, and though still drugged and half asleep, Cathy had been dragged back from the black abyss. He was to lose no time in coming, as there must be an immediate consultation, and absolute secrecy.

"We can't let it get into the Police Courts," she had said before she rang off, and Lorrimer wondered what in the world she could mean by that.

A taxi would run him down to Kingslade inside an hour, but Lorrimer was still unable to grapple with the new turn of events. To take deliberately an over-dose of a powerful narcotic seemed like the act of a mad woman, and Lorrimer's own determination to live as long as possible made him shrink from the idea. He could not tell what he felt. Relief that Cathy had failed in her wretched attempt, and a dim conviction that it somehow put her away into an unknown region where the sane could not penetrate. Slowly, very slowly, the truth began to dawn upon the darkness which had at first closed over him. Cathy was losing her hold upon the ordered way of life, and he had been damnably hard on her. Insanity is a vague term, and yet, if she were not wholly sane, it explained things, and, in a way, exonerated her. Then, again, what was a man to do? Ought he to tell Lady Carstairs and ask if there were any strain in the family to account for it? Not a very easy question to put to Cathy's aunt. He thought of how people would speak of it, and point him out. "That's Lorrimer, the fellow who married a mad woman," and then, what in the world did one *do?* God! it was awful.

The whole house was still in confusion when he arrived, and Hammersly met him with unspoken sympathy. Lorrimer looked at him questioningly, he wanted to know what he thought, but Hammersly kept his thoughts to himself.

"It was touch and go," he said; "and, by the way, Lorrimer, none of the servants know. They think it was a heart attack. It's just as well to keep the thing quiet."

By mid-day Cathy was over the crisis, and Monica came downstairs looking terribly worn and weary. She told Lorrimer to go up and see Cathy, but warned him to be very gentle with her. She had said, and stuck to it, that she wanted to sleep.

"You must agree with her," Monica said in a tired voice. "On no account excite her. She can't be left alone now, even for a moment."

Lorrimer left the room, and Hammersly poured out a glass of liqueur brandy and gave it to Doctor Henstock.

"It's time we had a talk," he remarked as she drank a little and he saw the colour return to her face.

"Her story is that she knew she would not sleep, and that she just took a good, stiff dose, so as to be on the safe side."

"Ah, that is what she would be likely to say," Hammersly replied. "It's a Police Court case, as I told you. Poor old Lorrimer, I hadn't the heart to speak of it to him."

"It can be hushed up," Monica tapped her fingers on the table; "there is no need for that. No one knows anything except ourselves, and she is over it now."

"And aware that she has run things rather fine?"

"No. She took it quite calmly, and I don't know. . . . After all, it may be just as she says."

"What does she talk of now?"

"The same thing. She is longing to get away."

Hammersly whistled softly to himself, and reflected for a moment.

"Will there be an amicable interview up there, this time?" he nodded his head towards the door. "Can Lorrimer gain time?"

Monica pressed her hand to her face, and he felt that she was near to tears.

"Come," he said, firmly. "We spoke quite honestly yesterday, let us have the courage to be honest again. If you allow her freedom and she attempts to take her life again, with success, how will you stand? Regard her as an ordinary case. What would be your duty?"

"I believe," Monica rallied herself and spoke more in her usual way, "that anyone who deliberately attempts suicide is temporarily insane."

"And you do not credit the theory that this was a deliberate attempt?"

"I can't—I can't," Monica said desperately. "You don't know how fearfully difficult it is for me."

"Yet I think I *do* know." He sat down near her and watched her closely. "Surely you have some sense of what is due to Lorrimer. Personally, I regard this sudden frenzy on the part of Mrs. Lorrimer as the one well-chosen act of her life. She has done it in the nick of time."

"How can that be?" Monica folded her hands one over the other.

"Because it gets her into safe keeping. In these days there is no hardship connected with mental treatment. Of course I haven't the smallest right to suggest, but if it was the case of my own sister—seeing I have no wife—I would act immediately."

He glanced up, as Lorrimer came back and stood in the doorway.

"She admits nothing," he said, closing the door carefully. "It's beyond me, Monica. I thought she would at least be sorry, but she can't understand what she has done, or the gravity of it."

"Did you make it up?"

Monica raised her eyes, and Lorrimer looked at her desperately.

"Nothing is altered," he said, and he sat down at the table. "It's all hopeless. She wants to go back to Lady Carstairs, after you and the London fellow have had your consultation to-morrow, and she sticks to that. I asked her if she knew what she was doing when she took the stuff, and she said she only wanted a good night's sleep." He sighed heavily. "Nurse Binns said that Cathy was certainly going to throw herself out of the window, and she just caught her in time." He glanced around him suddenly. "Can't you tell me the truth? Drop pretences, Monica, for God's sake, and let me have it."

Monica hesitated, and Hammersly spoke, his rich, deep voice sounding in the room.

"It would be best," he said. "I know that Doctor Henstock, very naturally, feels the utmost disinclination to admit what is only too clear. Mrs. Lorrimer is a danger to herself."

"She is mad, then?"

Lorrimer spoke to Monica.

"I ought to get another opinion," Monica said, bending forward a little; "Jack, it's all so close to me——"

He put his hand on her shoulder, and they did not speak for a second, and then Monica looked away.

"It need only be temporary," she said, "and though it is the hardest thing I have ever had to do, it might be for the best."

"Would she be cured in an—one of those places?"

"Certainly she would."

"If nothing is done she will fight to get out and go to Lady Carstairs. I told you, didn't I?"—he passed his hand over his forehead—"that she was as keen as ever on that? She talked also of a legal separation. If she was under supervision she might get over all this——"

Hammersly coughed a discreet cough, and spoke again.

"The main thing is to do the best for Mrs. Lorrimer, who is in no state to choose for herself. As it has happened, no one need know anything whatever. Luke, the doctor who was called in at the time Mrs. Lorrimer acted so wildly before, can be trusted to keep quiet." They both watched him attentively as though receiving orders. "For certification, you need the opinion of two doctors who have not met in consultation, and an order signed by a J.P. That part of it I can do, and, if you petition, the whole business can be carried through without the smallest hitch."

"I have always thought it such a tremendous responsibility," Monica said, murmuring the words to herself.

"When she is well, she comes back, and there is no one, except ourselves, who knows a thing about it," Hammersly said. "Surely that is preferable to allowing her freedom when we know what she is capable of doing even when she is closely guarded." He got up and looked at his watch. "I must be off," he said, turning to Lorrimer, "and don't regard me as an interfering idiot, mixing myself up in what is none of my business; but I was here early, and I saw Doctor Henstock at that time."

"Come back and dine here," Lorrimer said as he left; "it will have given one a little time to think it over."

They were alone now, and Lorrimer put his arms on the table and stared dully before him.

"Hammersly is right," he said at last. "It's the only thing to do with her."

Monica came to him, and pressed her hands over his burning forehead.

"Jack, it's the knowledge that I care so for you which makes me hesitate. I don't want much out of life, now, and what I want would be easy, if Cathy were away. But Cathy away, with her own people, and making havoc of all your great chances is a solution I can't accept. This other plan seems too much like taking what one wants, because one wants it, and I've always tried to play the game." Her face quivered, but she controlled herself with an effort.

"Let us try to be clear," he said, and he took her hands in his. "If we put ourselves out of it we can get at it better. Are these places all right? She would be comfortable and well looked after, and all that?" He got up with a violent gesture and paced the floor. "I can't feel that she is now anything to me. Poor soul, poor wretched soul, and yet she speaks and looks the same. Still; to try and kill herself——"

"If she really did try," Monica said slowly.

"Well, Nurse Binns swears to it, and——" he stood before her and searched her face with his eyes, "God! what a relief it would be to have this nightmare over."

Monica walked to her chair and sat down, clasping the carved arms with tense hands.

"Then let us have it so," she said.

After dinner the same evening, they sat again in the smoking-room, and Lorrimer had left the period of doubt, hesitation and sentiment behind him. Monica, too, had returned to her quiet, determined attitude towards life. Something definite had been arrived at by all three, though Hammersly could never have been said to have wavered from his own original decision. He sat by the table, and Lorrimer and Monica were in the shadow.

"I can get the necessary formalities arranged at once," he said, looking at Lorrimer. "If Mrs. Lorrimer were in a fit state to be trusted with the facts of her own case she might be registered as a voluntary boarder."

"That is impossible," Monica disposed of the suggestion. "The only way to avoid a very dangerous recurrence of some mental attack is to guard her from the smallest suspicion of what has to be done. She must believe that she is being taken to London, and my suggestion is that she should be motored over to Welldon Grange."

"How far is it?"

Lorrimer's voice broke in, and he moved in his chair.

"About fifteen miles," Hammersly replied. "It is a fine place, standing in huge grounds."

"I know Doctor Chapman," Monica spoke again, "and I had a talk with him over the telephone this afternoon. He is a most sympathetic and clever man. If he finds that Cathy is really only suffering from hysteria he won't keep her a day."

Silence fell again for a moment or two, and Hammersly lifted his tumbler of whisky and soda, and drank thoughtfully.

"Luke will be here in the morning," he said, "at ten o'clock. How do you propose to explain him, and account for the fact that the other doctor has not come?"

"That will be done," Monica said reservedly.

She had her own idea on the subject, and she did not care to discuss it.

"He will certify, I suppose?" Lorrimer asked.

"Of course no one can say that he will, for certain." Hammersly's words sounded doubtful, but neither Monica nor Lorrimer took any special notice of them. "All that is required is the evidence that he will want from Nurse Binns. He and Doctor Henstock will each certify the patient independently. My own part in the business does not make it necessary for me to see Mrs. Lorrimer."

"By God!" Lorrimer said, with sudden violence, "it is easy enough in all conscience. Is that the law?"

Hammersly nodded. "That is the law. It is loose, as you see. For instance, if, for reasons of your own, you wanted to lock up your wife, and not only your wife, but anyone who was your dependent, you could do so. It is because we all have such faith in the medical profession," he bowed towards Monica, "that such a law can stand."

The subject seemed suddenly to grow intensely unpleasant to his hearers, and Hammersly spoke of Welldon Grange and the many cures which had been made there.

Two words were avoided by all three—the word "asylum" and the word "lunatic"; it was as though, by calling the madhouse another name, they were lessening the doomed sound, and making it all normal and even attractive. The inmates were "patients," and the mysterious process called "mental treatment" was spoken of between them, but they never once spoke of Cathy as being insane.

Monica went into Cathy's room late that night, and found that she was still awake.

"Mug, Mug, you darling, I am feeling quite well," Cathy held out her white arms and clasped them round her friend's shoulders; "I am so repentant, really, and it was a silly thing to do, but it's all right, and you were splendid."

"Try and sleep," Monica said, smoothing back her hair; "I have a surprise for you, to-morrow."

"Tell me now," Cathy said persuasively; "I hate to be told bits and bats—and, talking of Bats, I must get Batkins' address; she is on my mind."

"Very well, then," Monica sat up and disentangled herself from Cathy's clasp; "I am having in old Luke, you remember the man who came that other time."

Cathy shuddered, and stared at Monica in astonishment.

"But why Luke? Mug, I don't like him. He smelt of gin or rum or something nasty."

"I am thinking of letting you go to-morrow," Monica said, "and Luke will do as well as anyone else, in the circumstances."

"You know best," Cathy agreed. "And I really go back to-morrow? Can I ring up Aunt Amy after breakfast?"

Monica said nothing for a moment or two, and then she spoke.

"I think you had better leave everything to me," she said at last; "my plan is that you should be motored out for a good blow of fresh air first, and have lunch out."

Cathy caught her hands and held them.

"You aren't fooling me?" she said. "You aren't engineering some kind of unexpected honeymoon for me and Jack? It's no good, Mug. I saw him to-day, and I felt that I simply couldn't do otherwise than I have already decided. Promise me that you aren't up to anything."

Monica got up from the bed suddenly and walked to the window. The stars outside looked very distant and cold, even though the night was warm. Below, in the garden, she saw the red glow of Lorrimer's cigar, and heard the crunch of the gravel under his pacing feet. His words came back to her, "God! what a relief it would be," and she thought of Cathy, who was lying against her pillows, Cathy who intended to wreck all Lorrimer's great future.

"I am not thinking of anything of the kind," she said.

"I wish, indeed, that it were possible, Cath. If it were, I would work heaven and earth to bring it about."

"I must get right away," Cathy said; "I am hungry for liberty and my own people. I suppose that somewhere, deep down and often forgotten, one loves one's own best. Jack and I are strangers, but it took time to realise it."

"Don't begin to think of it now," Monica said in a voice of warning. "Oh, Cathy, you never realise how hard you are upon others."

Cathy looked at Monica's back, for she did not turn.

"Am I?" she said in a wondering voice. "I suppose I am. But it was an accident with those tabloids, Mug. That was really all."

For a moment Doctor Henstock seemed as though she was going to speak passionately, but she held herself in, and she did not again approach the bed where Cathy lay.

"Whatever happens in the future," she said, "remember that I have acted for the best, and it has not been easy."

She walked to the door as she spoke, and though Cathy called to her she did not turn, but went out, closing it behind her.

Next morning Cathy was interviewed by Doctor Luke, and Monica did not make her usual early visit to her room. Doctor Luke appeared to be more than usually nerve-ridden and shaky, and he did very little more than ask Cathy for her ethical views on the question of suicide. Cathy, in wild spirits and with a touch of mischief in her heart, told him that it depended upon whether your spiritual faith was greater than your desire to go on with life, once it had become unendurable.

"Like everything else," she said, leaning back against the big cushions of her sofa, "it is a question of motive. I don't believe, Doctor Luke, that anything really matters except that. Do you remember the case of the 'very gallant gentleman' who went out into the endless wastes of snow so that he might not be a burden upon his friends? It was surely a noble death."

Doctor Luke blew his nose and shuffled his feet on the floor.

"Suicide is always a most serious crime," he said; "you can't get away from that."

"I don't want to," Cathy objected. "I am only saying, since you asked me, that I firmly believe there are times when it can be as fine an act as martyrdom."

She could not think why the wretched little creature harped so persistently on the subject, and she was relieved when at length he rose and said "good-bye" to her. She never wanted to see him again.

At last Monica came, and Cathy, with her eyes full of gladness, called to her through the door.

"It is a glorious day," she said, "and even if it is wicked and cruel of me, Mug, I am happy again, in bits. Where is Jack?"

"Jack went away after breakfast," Monica said, no light in her own eyes. "You can get up now, Cathy, and I've told Nurse Binns to pack your clothes."

"She isn't coming on our joy-ride? Oh, no, Muggins, I should hate it if she were."

"She is not coming," Monica replied.

"Doctor Luke is meditating suicide," Cathy said as she came from her room, dressed, a little later. "He talked of nothing else. I should imagine that the best place for him is a lunatic asylum."

Monica was bending over a box, and she said nothing.

"I was remembering some lines out of a book I used to love," Cathy went out, "and they thrilled me when I woke. I don't remember the connection, but they are gorgeous lines:

"John York, John York, where art thou gone, John York?
King of my heart, King of my heart, I am out on the trail of thy bugles."

She stood at the wide window with its stone balcony full of flowers and held out her arms to the world. "I am like the Prodigal, I was dead and am alive again, though I wasn't lost, and so haven't to be found. But oh, it's a wonderful thing to be happy, and until you have been a prisoner you never know the wild joy of getting free again." She turned back to the room. "Freedom is worth more than anything else, and it's no wonder that men die to get it. Where are we going first? Did you ring up Aunt Amy, and what did the old darling say?"

"I thought we would go to High Matcham," Monica said, avoiding the second question. "There is a very fine old place not far from the village," she watched Cathy to see if the name conveyed anything to her, "a place called Welldon Grange."

"I don't like granges," Cathy laughed, "they sound eerie and suggest rats and vipers, but I'll go anywhere you like, Mug, you've been so good to me—so good to me, Mug, dear."

"The car is ready, I expect," Monica said, looking at her watch, and then the doors were opened and the confusion of departure made its way over the threshold.

"One should always turn round three times before leaving a house, so my old nurse told me," Cathy said as she stood in the hall, and she whirled round rapidly. "I am in a foolish mood. Don't look so cross, Nurse Binns, you've got me off your hands at last."

She waved her good-bye to the servants, who were gathered in curious, suspicious groups in the hall and on the steps, and as she leant back in the car, Cathy's blue eyes saluted the fair summer sky.

They swept round by the lake and out of sight of the upper windows last of all, and on through the gates, and Cathy squeezed Monica's arm. Mug was dreadfully down on her luck and wanted cheering. Poor Mug had borne all the burden and heat of the day, and had said a hundred times that at some remote age, such as fifty, Cathy would live to regret her defiance of medical discipline. But who cares what will happen at fifty? Certainly Cathy did not care a rap. She was happier than she had been for ages, though her whole married life seemed now to have contracted and become just those wretched weeks and weeks of bondage in two rooms.

"John York, John York, where art thou gone, John York?"

she quoted again, with the wild, inconsequent reply:

"King of my heart, King of my heart, I am out on the trail of thy bugles."

"How far is it to your nasty, ratty old Grange?" she asked. "I almost wish I had said good-bye to Jack."

"Not a long run," Monica replied; "we shall get there quite soon enough."

And then she relapsed into silence, but there was neither rest nor peace in her reticence.

CHAPTER XVIII

Robert Amyas had learned a great deal in the year which followed upon Cathy Rossiter's marriage with Lorrimer. Every one seemed to like Lorrimer when they came to know him better, and Lady Catherine, who might be counted upon as a "last ditcher," had become warm in her praises of Cathy's husband. Robert found no one to agree with him, and yet he had never felt himself able to accept the general verdict upon a man whom he instinctively mistrusted.

Cathy was gone from among them, to a great degree, and Robert realised that he found life hopelessly dull and flavourless without her. She had been like spring-time, and a year devoid of the season of springing hopes is a dull year. One went on, of course, because, whatever happens, people must go on somehow, and Robert discovered that he was able to put up some kind of fight against his own specially besetting sins. He was working quite hard, for him, and had begun to write up forgotten pages of history.

Everyone else seemed to be happy, that was the discouraging part of it. Cathy was happy, so was Lilian, though he did not ever meet her, but he heard things that put it beyond doubt. Twyford was living a roving life and seldom or never in London. Amyas felt himself to be the odd man out; a disconsolate condition at the age of thirty-two. He had moved from his old quarters and taken rooms in Jermyn Street, and at times he called on Lady Carstairs, regarding his visits there as a penitent might regard an iron bracelet which made him wince, when he sat and smiled and listened to her praises of Lorrimer, and her account of the golden happiness which was Cathy's. To hear of her was his main motive in these visits, and he had gone very frequently at the time when Cathy was ill. The vague stories which were in circulation with regard to Cathy and Barlow had not reached him, and it was only after a long time that rumour made its way into his club, where he heard a fellow member tell a friend that Mrs. Lorrimer had been "at her old games again." It annoyed him acutely to hear her spoken of in such terms, but he listened with smooth indifference.

"I had it from a bounder called Hammersly, who is very thick with Lorrimer. He said that there had been a downright row over it. Barlow—you know the man—went down to Kingslade and hung about there."

"And what happened?" asked the man to whom he spoke. "These days, it's usually shooting; so it takes a bit of nerve to go hanging around other men's wives. No jury will hang a husband now; it's against their principles."

"Not any shooting, as far as I know," the club gossip continued, "but there's something up." He turned, and recognised Amyas. "You know the Lorrimers, Robert; what's this story about? Hammersly said very little, but I suppose you know the facts?"

"No one ever knows any facts," Amyas said, with a bored smile; "they are the things which people invent. There is no story, and no scandal. Hammersly, or whatever his name is, was having you on, old boy."

"Having me on? Not he. He had just been peace-making, so he said, and he also said peace was a damned hard thing to make, when you consider how easy it is to go to war."

The conversation stuck in Robert's mind and he could not forget it. He cursed Barlow steadily and carefully, and decided that he would go round to see Aunt Amy and find out from her whether she had any suspicions on the subject.

Lady Carstairs knew nothing of any scandals. Amyas discovered that much without difficulty; because if there had been, Aunt Amy would immediately have begun to explain it away. She would have said, "Cathy is again interesting herself in politics, and those Socialist people are doing their best to get hold of her." She would have told Robert Amyas that Lorrimer had "very properly" objected to their manœuvres, and she would have alluded to Barlow as "that unfortunate and misguided young man, whose father was one of my oldest friends." Lady Carstairs frequently reminded Amyas of a bee that repaired breaks and cracks in the comb with busy diligence. She seemed quite satisfied about everything, but was feeling her own banishment from Cathy more than she chose to admit.

"When she is better I want to take her away," she said, her kind, weary eyes looking pale and washed out. "I want to go abroad for a little, Robert, and I felt that if only Cathy would come with me it would be indeed a pleasant change."

"Why can't Cathy see her friends?" he asked. "She might be in Siberia."

"Monica Henstock is in charge of her. I don't really feel any confidence in women doctors, but I suppose she is quite reliable."

"I suppose so," Amyas agreed, "but it must be rather hard on Cathy."

He left Lady Carstairs with a dull feeling of dissatisfaction. If anything was "up" it would be kept from her, and yet Cathy might want her friends. To allow Cathy to get mixed up in some wayward and futile affair with George Barlow was so like what Amyas expected Lorrimer to do. Heavy, stupid, and without comprehension, the man was a positive danger to his wife.

He wandered into the park and sat down under the shadow of a tree. Had Lorrimer really caged that wild bird? Perhaps at that very moment she was beating against the gilded wires, aching for her old wild freedom. He watched the riders going by, and saw Twyford coming along at a walk, mounted on a powerful bay. Twyford looked bored and gloomy, and, though they had never been friends, Amyas got up and leaned on the rails, hailing him with uplifted stick.

Twyford pulled up and did not appear astonished; he never evinced surprise.

"I've been to see Lady Carstairs," Amyas said, the light catching his hazel eyes. "I went there to find out whether she had any news of Cathy Rossiter," he had always refused to use her new name. "Now I want to know whether you have heard from her?"

Twyford shook his head. "No," he said, "I never hear."

"Can't you go and see her?" Robert remarked carelessly. "I would, only, for some reason, Lorrimer objects to me, and it is not possible. I ask, because there are stories about, and she may want her friends."

"She is quite happy," Twyford said, his strong, dark face with his square chin set and combative. "If you know anything to the contrary, it is a surprise to me."

"You believe in letting things alone?" Amyas shrugged his shoulders; "I expect you're right."

"I don't see that either you or I can do anything"; Twyford tightened the reins, and Amyas nodded as he cantered off.

"No thoroughfare" in that direction either. Amyas lighted a cigarette and sat down again.

Barlow was butting in, and Barlow had a dirty reputation. He was successful with women, no doubt about it, and here were a crowd of people—a crowd of two, anyhow, himself and Twyford—who were bound upon the wheel of good form and unable to act. Meanwhile, what was going on at Kingslade?

Amyas reviewed the situation with unwonted simplicity and direction of thought. He had fallen slowly in love with Cathy, and gradually the power she exercised over him had become omnipotent. For her sake he had fought himself, and had conquered the slow, crawling monopoly of the drug habit. Formerly he had dallied with fastidious vices, and Lilian's influence had never acted, except as a spur to make him continue to do so with steady deliberation. Cathy, who had nothing to say to him except in the way of friendship, had exorcised devils, and he had painfully set his house in order. He made no secret of the fact that he loved her, and if she were really happy with Lorrimer it was left for him to make that the basis for his own poor content. If she were not happy, the situation assumed other features, and he was prepared to do anything to be of use to her.

In a way, the situation was ridiculous. If he chose to take a taxi, he could get down to Kingslade and Lorrimer would hardly be able to order him out of the house. He would not need to copy the example of Barlow, for instance, and he wondered why so simple a solution had not presented itself to him at once.

Having made up his mind, he walked out under the arched gateway into Piccadilly and hailed a passing taxi. The hour was still early, and, if Cathy was well enough to see him, he could spend some time at Kingslade.

He looked around him with interest as he passed through the village, and he admired the high gates and the wrapt seclusion of the park. The lake reflected the clear sky, and the garden was a blaze of colour and scent. As the taxi turned up the sweep of the drive, he admitted that Lorrimer had certainly achieved the right setting for his wife, and the dignity of the old house threw its spell upon him.

The front door was closed, and Robert instructed the taxi-driver to wait, as he rang the bell. So this was where Cathy lived, and perhaps the room with the closed windows, facing south and looking out over a garden of flowering plants, was hers.

The man who opened the door in response to the second ringing of the bell, looked startled, and his manner was on the defensive. He told Amyas that he could not see Mrs. Lorrimer, and Robert stood looking into the wide hall behind him wondering what his next move should be. He decided, at once, to ask no questions. The manservant would certainly lie to him, even if he knew more than he admitted, and Amyas asked politely whether Colonel Lorrimer was at home. He thought that the man looked slightly more at his ease, and he was informed that Colonel Lorrimer had gone away that morning, and would not be back for some days.

"I am singularly unfortunate," Amyas said, in his bored, sophisticated voice. "I wonder if I could have some tea before I go back?"

With the air of an irate Prime Minister who finds himself in a corner, the manservant admitted Amyas, and showed him into the large drawing-room. It was a dead room, so Robert felt, and had not been really lived in for some considerable time. You might search in vain for traces of Cathy here. He sat down by the window and waited, taking the very chair where Monica had sat the previous day, and he looked out over the sunlit lawn, wondering at himself a little. Lorrimer was away, that was one blessing, and perhaps the fates would be kind. He opened the window and stood outside. Above him ran the stone balcony which made a terrace outside the upper windows, and he began to whistle softly. Underneath the deep shade of the balcony there were a few chairs set at intervals, and the morning's paper lay on the tesselated floor. Amyas picked it up and walked into the sunlight. He looked upwards at the house again, and he saw the windows of the room above thrown open. A maid with a white cap appeared, and tied the curtains upon the inner side into loops, and shook a duster over the balustrade. Amyas hailed her, on a sudden impulse.

"How is Mrs. Lorrimer to-day?" he asked, and the girl stood and looked down at him.

"Better," she said, speaking down to him; "she left here this morning."

Amyas nodded, and the sound of the tinkle of china informed him that his grudging tea was being prepared within. He walked back into the drawing-room and sat down again, and a minute later the hostile manservant reappeared carrying a heavy silver tray. Cathy was gone. Yet Lady Carstairs certainly knew nothing of any projected move, and the man who had answered the door had not admitted that his mistress had left the house.

Amyas poured himself out a cup of tea. A happy woman never wants intruding friends. Friendship is the need of those who are at odds with life, and probably the Barlow episode had ended in reconciliation, stronger than ever, as he thought of the careful method by which Lorrimer would act. He was good at that kind of thing, and he played his cards, not like a gambler, but like a sharper. He finished his tea, eating nothing, out of some personal feeling toward breaking the bread of a foe, and began to think of the homeward journey. There was certainly nothing to detain him any longer at Kingslade.

He looked out of the drawing-room window again, and closed it, and, as he did so, he saw two men crossing the grass in earnest conversation. One was a man with a heavy, clever face and dark eyes, and the other a poor, seedy-looking individual in shabby clothing; Amyas watched them from behind the thin lace of the blind. Probably the wealthy-looking bounder was a constituent, but who the other might be he could not guess. The dark, heavy-featured man was thoroughly at home in the place, and pointed to the seats along the verandah.

They came nearer, and up the steps, and Amyas drew back a little. Their evident intention was to sit just outside his window, and he had no desire to overhear their conversation. He heard the squeal of the chairs being pulled over the flags, and a momentary silence between the two was broken by the deep tones of the well-dressed, offensive-looking man.

"It is too late, Luke. You can't go back now. In any case, Mrs. Lorrimer is gone," he said, and Amyas stood rigid.

He had no earthly right to listen to what was evidently a private conversation, and, against that, his sense of dismay that anyone who looked like the creature who was addressed as "Luke," could be even remotely interested in Cathy, made him eager to hear more.

"It's on my mind, Hammersly, it's on my mind."

"Well, spit it off your chest then," Hammersly replied with a coarse laugh. "You weren't so damned particular in other cases—cases, mind you, which are a great deal more serious in the eyes of the law."

"I came back to see that woman doctor," the other voice went on. "I felt such pity for the poor lady. I don't want to have any hand in it. If it *is* the case, another doctor would do as well. There's Townley, in his big house——"

"Townley has a wife with a tongue, and the whole object of getting you was to keep things quiet." Hammersly spoke impatiently. "If you talk, you know what you will get."

"I was rushed into it," Luke's tones quavered and broke. "Is it true that I am too late?"

"God's truth." Amyas heard Hammersly move, as though to end the interview. "She is there by this, and you can do nothing. You acted on conviction and evidence," he spoke in a heavy, impressive voice "you were paid for your job, and——"

"I'd like to see Colonel Lorrimer."

"Well, you can't. He has gone to London, and Kingslade is to be closed——"

Amyas turned quickly, he had heard footsteps outside the door, and he walked to meet them. The broken conversation had filled him with a wild desire to act, and yet he was as hopelessly mystified as a man well could be. He reached the drawing-room door just as it was opened by the manservant, and passed out into the hall, picking up his soft grey hat and stick.

"I think I will take a turn round the garden before I leave," he remarked, as he proffered a tip to the gloomy-looking servant. "You have splendid roses here?"

"So I am informed, sir," the man admitted with reluctance, and Amyas walked down the steps.

"I shall not be much longer now," he said to the driver of the taxi, who was employing his time reading the paper.

Hammersly and his strange companion had come to the house by the back, so they were likely to be still unaware of any intruder, and Amyas followed a gravel path which led him round to the south side of the house, overlooking the gardens and the turn of the drive. As he walked along the gravel, his footsteps sounding loud and giving due warning of his approach, he saw Hammersly and Luke move beyond the line of shadow; they had moved away, then, before the coming of the manservant had disturbed their conference. Hammersly looked round, and rapidly concluded whatever parting words he had to say; nodding to Luke, he came at once towards Amyas with a genial smile.

"Can I be of any service to you?" he asked amiably.

"Colonel and Mrs. Lorrimer are both away, and, as I am rather a *persona grata* here, I am sure I may offer you a drink."

"You are very kind," Amyas said, "but I shall not trouble you. I have had some tea. A wholly reluctant footman, who suspected me of designs on the spoons, provided me with all I wanted. I ought to have 'phoned to say I was coming, but it didn't occur to me at the time."

"It's a nice run from Town," Hammersly said affably, "and a charming place."

"Is Lorrimer away for long?" Amyas asked, looking over the sweeping view with half-closed eyes. "I thought they were here for the summer. Doctor Henstock said something of the kind."

"Ah, you know Doctor Henstock? A clever, able woman."

"I've known her for years," Robert said, smiling sleepily; "she has all the virtues. Is she also away? But I suppose she is?"

"They made some plan in a hurry," Hammersly said, offering his cigar case to Amyas, who shook his head. "You won't smoke? No? Seriously, Mrs. Lorrimer has given them all a lot of uneasiness lately, and Doctor Henstock felt that the only thing for her was a change." They began to pace the rose-bordered path together. "What they finally determined to do I can't tell you. I only know that, when I was dining here last night, the idea then was to take a motor trip—less fatiguing than anything else."

"And Mrs. Lorrimer was no better?"

"No better," Hammersly echoed. "Poor lady."

"No doubt Lady Carstairs will hear from her," Amyas said, swallowing his desire to be rude to the man at his side.

"No doubt," Hammersly agreed cordially. "Are you sure you won't come in and have a drink? Or perhaps you would come to my own house?"

"I have to get back, or I should be delighted."

Hammersly had walked him round the house, and they now stood in the bay of the avenue, and Robert signed to his taxi-driver. "I think I'll be getting along," he said, and Hammersly, with the air of a host on his own doorstep, sped the parting guest.

As he watched the taxi depart, he pondered for a moment.

"What in hell did that over-dressed ass want, poking about down here?" he thought, and then he went into the house.

Amyas had sufficient food for reflection as he drove through the purple shadows. Kingslade looked like the very heart of peace and quietude, and the park lay behind him deep in the glory of the low evening light. Hammersly behaved as though the place belonged to him. The idea was preposterous. A drunken publican would be more in the picture than this scented, affluent, glib city man, who talked familiarly of "the poor, dear lady." Amyas moved uncomfortably on the hard cushions of his hired conveyance. Bad as Hammersly was, Luke was even worse, but Luke had come there to undo some act of which he had repented himself.

"Any other doctor would have done as well." "It's on my mind, Hammersly, it's on my mind." What was on his mind?

Robert Amyas tried to comfort his vague fears. He knew Monica Henstock, and that was sufficient guarantee that Cathy was duly safeguarded and cared for. Monica's integrity couldn't be questioned. Amyas did not care for Monica, but he fully appreciated her steady value. Monica had been at Kingslade all along, and now, if Cathy had left the place, was she still with her?

The more he thought of it the more convinced Amyas became that Cathy and Lorrimer had not made up the quarrel; he was completely dissatisfied. Luke had spoken as a man speaks when he is driven and desperate, and he had not the look of a sensitive person who is temperamentally subject to fits of remorse; and the point of Hammersly's gibe had been plain enough. How was it that Lorrimer had allowed such a creature to be called into his house, and why had Monica Henstock agreed to consult with him? He was a drink-sodden remnant from the world's refuse heap, and what had he to do with Cathy Rossiter?

CHAPTER XIX

Robert sat for a time smoking when he got back to his own rooms, his eyes on the tall candles set in a heavy silver candlestick, and after a time he decided what he would do. Getting up, he walked to the telephone on his writing-table and, ringing up the exchange, he waited, a faint smile on his face. He had not spoken to Lilian since she left him, and it seemed odd to turn to her just then.

Presently he began to speak. "Hullo, are you 2659 Mayfair?" and Lilian's voice replied from the distance. "Hullo —It's you, Lilian, is it?" He could hear the faint gasp of surprise—"Robert speaking. Have you seen anything of your friend, Doctor Henstock, lately?" Still obviously astonished, Lilian's clear voice informed him that Monica was at Kingslade with Cathy Rossiter. "Could you see her?" Amyas said, "I want to know something which she can tell me."

"Is it urgent? Shall I ring her up now? I have the number."

"She isn't there. It's rather difficult to explain like this, but I am anxious to see her, or for you to see her."

Lilian made no reply for a minute, and then she seemed to have made up her mind.

"Are you worried, Robert? You sound unlike yourself."

"I want to know something," he reiterated.

"How would it be if you—if I came and saw you? I'm pretty sure you wouldn't have rung me up for nothing."

"I am glad you suggested it," he said; "I believe if we talk it over together it will be best."

Amyas hung up the receiver, and walked away from his writing-table. It was strange to think of meeting Lilian again, and yet it was highly characteristic of her to suggest it. Lilian was a good sportsman; and had a definite and defiant good will towards men. Once the hopeless situation between them had been cleared up, it was possible—certainly it was possible for them to be friends. Robert had come to the conclusion that the happiest of mortals has not many friends, even though men live by friendship. Lilian was soundly poised on her own convictions. Had she been selfish? Well, if she had, he had also shown the same fault; and Lilian had at least found happiness. Life had intensified for both of them, and now he turned to her with the tribute of trust.

He waited for her with a quickened beating of his heart, and when she came into the room they shook hands quite naturally. It was creditable, somehow, and they both knew it, and rose to the slightly dramatic sense of the meeting.

"You will sit down," Amyas said, "and will you smoke, Lilian? It helps people to talk things through."

"We aren't going to talk of ourselves?" she asked. "But I would like to think that you are not unhappy, Robert."

"I am not a subject for tears," he said in his light way. He sat down and drummed his long fingers on the table. "I am becoming melodramatic," he said, as she watched him with her clear, keen eyes, deep-set and clever.

She was beautifully dressed, and the cloak of Venetian embroidery and fur which had wrapped her, lay in heavy folds round her as she sat in a low chair.

"Melodramatic? You?" she asked with a laugh. "It sounds rather unexpected."

"Tell me," he said, with a sudden change of feeling, "have you been true to your friends? Where are your friends, and what are they doing?"

"I haven't seen much of Cathy since her marriage."

"Why not?"

"I hardly know why. I suppose we both had other interests."

Lilian was evidently facing his question truthfully in the secret places of her own thought.

"And Monica Henstock? What of her? She used to be with you very often."

"I don't like Monica as much as I did," Lilian made the admission quite frankly. "She disappoints me."

Amyas broke away from generalities. "Could you get in touch with her again? I must tell you what happened to-day, and why I ask you all this."

He began his story again, and Lilian listened attentively. When he had finished, she waited some time before she spoke.

"It is absolutely inexplicable as it stands," she said, clasping her hands and looking at Amyas steadily. "Cathy is 'there,' wherever that may be, now, and I take it Monica is with her. If she is, it gives one a sense of safety; that and the fact that Lorrimer, even though it was a most unlikely kind of marriage, adores her. I have never once doubted that he did."

"And I have never believed in him," Amyas said slowly.

"What we must do is to find out where Cathy is, and I will go to her," Lilian said eagerly. "She can't be far away. Suppose, for instance, that her nerves were upset or that she wanted different treatment, she may be in London." She looked up at the clock. "It isn't ten yet, and possibly Monica may have left her somewhere, if my idea is right, and be back at her own house again." She got up and walked to the writing-table. "I'll ring her up now, Robert, and put an end to this queer feeling of mystery."

Amyas began to walk slowly round the room, his hands in his pockets, and he conquered his impatience as Lilian rang up Doctor Henstock's number.

"It seems as though the house were empty," she said, over her shoulder, "I get no answer."

"Try again," he said, with subdued impatience, and after a moment he heard Lilian speak quickly.

"Is that you, Muggins? I've been ringing for ages. Oh, you are only just back. Well, I want to see you soon."

She listened for a little, and, covering the speaking-tube with her hand, she signed to Robert to come to her, and talked in a low voice.

"Monica says that she can make no engagements. Her voice sounds dreadfully tired."

"Don't tell her too much."

"Trust me," Lilian nodded at him. "Lunch to-morrow?

Out of the question. But why? When did you leave Cathy?" Again a pause cut short the monologue. "Then you saw her to-day? Dear old Cath; I'm going to see her if I have to bring a ladder. Oh, you've given up the case? Tell me more about it. Is she at Kingslade? I asked you if she is still at Kingslade?" Again she covered the tube with her hands and whispered to Robert. "Monica says that Cathy has been sent to a quiet little place where she is to be kept in a rest cure for a bit. She is all right, really, but it was decided that she should have a change."

"Ask for the address," Robert said, speaking in low tones.

"Can't I have Cathy's address?" Lilian spoke again. "But why not? Surely I may be trusted." She frowned and her voice grew impatient. "Colonel Lorrimer wants no one to interfere? My dear Mug, is it likely that I should? I only want to know where she is. Can't you tell me anything? No one is to know? Nonsense, you don't suppose that Lady Carstairs will be satisfied with that, or any of us? Muggins, Muggins——" She turned again—"Robert, she has rung off."

They stared at each other blankly, and Robert took Lilian by her arm.

"We must get the address," he said, and he looked at her searchingly. "We have a right to know where Cathy is."

"We have no right," Lilian said distractedly, "but we shall find out. I'll see Muggins and force her to speak."

But even as she spoke, a helpless feeling overtook her. Monica was not the kind of woman who could be argued with, once her own mind was made up.

"What have they done with her?" Amyas asked again. "Let us try and get the thing clear." He told her the fragmentary story of Barlow which he had heard at the club, and he returned again to his own instinctive mistrust of Lorrimer. "The one thing to hold on by was that Monica had Cathy in her charge, and now that is ended it makes it damnable."

"I think we are exaggerating," Lilian said, with a return to the common-sense view of the situation. "Cathy is a handful, and not the type of woman it is easy to coerce. If she was meeting Barlow against Jack Lorrimer's wishes, he would never be able to stop it. She will give them all the slip. She is wonderfully resourceful and no rest cure can contain her long. I suppose we shall have to wait until we hear from her."

"I'll tell you what you can do," Amyas said, as Lilian put on her wrap. "You can go to Aunt Amy to-morrow, and tell her that she must see Lorrimer. You need say nothing to alarm her, and only tell her that you rang up Monica, and heard from her that she wasn't looking after Cathy any more. Ask Aunt Amy for Cathy's address, and if she hasn't got it make her feel that Lorrimer must tell her."

"I'll do that early to-morrow," Lilian agreed, "and I'll let you know." She looked at him for a moment. "I hope there's nothing to worry about, Robert, and perhaps there is not."

"Perhaps not," he agreed, but there was very little heart in his voice.

The next morning, Lilian went early to see Lady Carstairs, and found her writing letters in the big drawing-room. She had by this time nearly forgotten that Lilian was an offender, and she greeted her with all her old cordiality.

"My dear Lilian, it is ages since I saw you. I seem very remote now, and the house is quiet since all the young people left."

Lilian gradually brought the conversation round to the subject of Cathy.

"I had heard nothing of Monica for so long that I rang her up last night," she said.

"But, dear child, Monica is at Kingslade. She is a most efficient doctor, I am told. I hope it is the case; Cathy's illness has lasted very much longer than we expected. I have never been able to believe in women doctors, but when I suggested to Jack that he should call in Sir Roderick Raymond, he said that Monica would object. I saw his point, but I was not altogether satisfied."

"Monica has come back to London, and has given up the case," Lilian said cheerfully. "Now is your chance, Aunt Amy."

"You surprise me." Lady Carstairs looked slightly alarmed. "That is a sudden move, and I was not consulted."

"I only know what Monica told me. She said that 'they' —whoever 'they' are—had felt that Cathy wanted different treatment, and so she is now having a rest cure."

There was a slight pause, and Lady Carstairs was evidently affronted.

"It is very odd that Jack told me nothing of it," she said. "I should have been told. Perhaps he is coming to see me himself."

"Of course he is," Lilian agreed. "Why not ask him? He must be dreadfully worried about her, and that has put everything else out of his mind. It was a very happy marriage."

"Wonderfully so," said Lady Carstairs. "I was against it, as you know. I believe in marriages which include more points of unity, but I was wrong, and Jack is admirable."

She fiddled nervously with her papers, and looked at Lilian.

"Of course, between ourselves, Lilian, I knew that Cathy needed not only a man of strong character, but one who would understand her impulses. The loss of the dear little baby was a dreadful blow, but that is over now, and I felt that all would be well."

"It would be kind to send for Jack," Lilian suggested, "and we all of us want to know where Cathy is."

"Yes," Aunt Amy said, "I can't bear to think we are in ignorance. Perhaps if I wrote a line to Kingslade he might come up to-day. Poor, dear Jack, how wretched for him."

"Monica said he was in London," Lilian replied hastily; "at least I seem to remember that I heard her say so. Wouldn't it be better to write to the House—or ring him up there?"

"I will write," Lady Carstairs said, with a return to placidity. "No doubt they had first-rate advice. I must find out from Jack what was said. A rest cure is often a very excellent thing, and Mary Gregson frequently speaks of her own weeks in Sir Roderick's Nursing Home as a kind of heaven on earth."

"Mary Gregson's whole life is a rest cure. She isn't like Cathy."

"Yet I am sure it must be a relief to have nothing to do." Lady Carstairs smiled. "I shall see Jack about it."

Lilian got up, and stood undecided for a moment or two. "Will you let me know what you hear?" she asked. "I have been feeling lately that we have all seen so little of Cathy. I dare say that Jack Lorrimer is a paragon, but he has robbed Cathy's friends of her to an outrageous extent."

Lady Carstairs did not agree, but she did not say much. A married woman was, in her eyes, the chattel of her husband. Women who were here, there and everywhere, were not to be admired, and she had an axiom that "East or West, Home was best." Lilian was a modern, and had behaved with the terrible disregard of the modern wife. She had not regarded a husband as a permanent and established fact, and perhaps Robert was to blame in some degree. You might explain the case by taking Amyas into consideration; but Lorrimer, solid, steady and changeless, was not the man to permit his wife any ridiculous liberty of action. If Lorrimer thought that Cathy needed a rest cure, he was sure to have good reason for being convinced of its necessity. He should have told Lady Carstairs, but above and before all, he was Cathy's husband, and he was strictly within his rights.

Lady Carstairs picked up her pen, and wrote in her well-formed hand, inviting him to see her. She used tact, and said that "a mutual friend" had heard from Monica that she was no longer "taking care of dear Cathy." Lady Carstairs expressed herself as anxious to know who now was in charge of her niece, and she signed herself "Yours affectionately."

When Lorrimer received the letter, he was sitting on the terrace of the House of Commons, taking a solitary tea. He felt hostile towards the world, and Aunt Amy's letter in no way lessened his hostility. They were interfering already, these people, and wanting to know what was no concern of theirs. Hammersly had come up from Kingslade that morning, and warned Lorrimer that he must think out some story which would satisfy the curiosity of relatives and gossips; busy people where other folks' affairs were concerned. Now, Lady Carstairs had it from "a mutual friend" that Monica was back, and that she had given up the case. It was absolutely maddening. He tore the letter up and flung it over the parapet, but it did not absolve him from action. He would have to go and see the old tyrant. She was sugary enough now, since he had made his way in the world, but there were memories which sprang to life as he thought of her and prodded him into a recurrence of his old antagonism towards her. In all the world there was only one person he really trusted, and that was Monica Henstock. He had not dared to go to see her, because of the things which she might have to say. What of that "joy-ride" with the unsuspecting Cathy? How had it ended? Had Doctor Chapman, with his special instinct for dealing with the insane, been able to make her accept the situation quietly? All these things he would have to learn from Monica before they could put the hideous subject away and forget it finally and for ever. He hated facing unpleasant truths, and even though he needed Monica sorely, he had put off making any plan to see her until the facts were less vivid and, possibly, less poignant. He thought again of Lady Carstairs; she who was "affectionately his." How would she feel if he went to her and blurted out the truth: "Your niece is mad. She is locked up in an asylum, because, if she were not there, she would outrage decency. She lied to me about a man who is every woman's lover and boasts of it; she attacked a wretched creature who tried to hold the door, and then attempted to take her own life." No one was to know where Cathy was, and, for a time at least, no one was to hear that she had lost her reason. Dirty linen was to be washed somewhere well out of sight, and until Doctor Chapman reported upon Cathy, the ugly story must be kept secret.

He got up wearily. If he was to lie successfully he must do so unhesitatingly, and rout the faction who would be up in arms on the first hint of the truth. He nodded to one or two men whom he knew, and as he passed, one of his own party glanced after him.

"If Lorrimer hadn't got money, I doubt if he'd be worth powder and shot," he said to a friend.

"And Hammersly, as well as money," added the friend. "Lorrimer does what he's told, but the brains aren't his. He's a 'ghost,' though he doesn't look like one."

CHAPTER XX

Lorrimer sat before Lady Carstairs and stirred a belated and chilly cup of tea. He found his way full of pit-falls, and he had plunged into rather than skated around them.

"May I not hear all particulars?" Lady Carstairs asked.

"Doctor Henstock called in a local man," Lorrimer explained, "a fella' called Luke. He had been attending Cathy before; that other time——"

He winced, and Lady Carstairs held out a soothing hand.

"Yes, yes," she said, "I remember."

"They had a consultation, and both agreed that, so long as Cathy was at Kingslade, she was not sufficiently—er—quiet."

"Not in her beautiful home?" Aunt Amy's eyebrows went upwards. "I thought, the day I went to see her, that nothing could well be more peaceful and delightful."

"I am sorry to say," Lorrimer sat up stiffly; a confidence of some kind must be made, and this was the moment for it, "that Cathy had begun to give a great deal of trouble." He paused, and plunged again. "You remember her friendship with the Danielli crowd?"

Lady Carstairs nodded silently. She was not likely to forget the episode of the diamond brooch.

"They were determined not to let her drift, I suppose. Anyhow, Barlow found his way down to Kingslade and saw her."

"Dear me, dear me," Aunt Amy's hands shook nervously. "I am dreadfully grieved to hear this from you, Jack."

He bowed his head silently, and then spoke again.

"As it is not possible to keep an eternal watch over anyone of Cathy's age, and Doctor Henstock felt she could not continue the strain of it all, it was settled that Cathy should have a rest cure."

"Very right," Lady Carstairs agreed; "I am sure you were well advised. But you must let me know what doctor is now in charge of her and where she is. You really must."

Lorrimer moistened his dry lips and stared at the carpet.

"It seems to me," he said, "that in my position, when I have all the responsibility to bear, I have also the right to decide whether anyone should know—whether even you, Lady Carstairs, should know more than I have told you."

"What possible harm could it do?" She was growing agitated and rather irritable. "I have asked you to let my own doctor see Cathy, but you refused this. Do not think that I shall press the question. I should not dream of trying to see her."

"Quite so," Lorrimer agreed absently. What a nuisance the woman was.

"Then you will give me her present address?"

"I can't do that," there was stubborn finality in his tone. "At present the only people who know it are myself, Doctor Henstock, and two others. The—er—establishment where Cathy is receiving treatment is above question a place where she will be well looked after."

Lady Carstairs thought for a moment. She had suddenly begun to dislike Lorrimer again. He had married Cathy, it was true, and he had heretofore behaved admirably. Now, all of a sudden, she was keenly aware of the claims of relationship, and also aware of the fact that she regarded Lorrimer as someone outside that circle.

"Cathy was in the position of a daughter to me," she said, trying to speak persuasively; "it alters things, as you will admit. I stood in the place of her mother. If I were her mother you *could* not refuse to let me know where my own child is, and I feel that it is due to me to know."

"I can't tell you," he replied stolidly. "In a few weeks' time I may have to tell you, but at present it is wiser, for Cathy's sake, that you should know nothing."

The slow, surging anger of age swept over Aunt Amy, and she looked at Lorrimer, her eyes icy.

"I will make no secret of my feelings," she said coldly. "You put me on one side at a time when I fully expected your consideration and confidence. That you give me neither does not lessen my own sense of responsibility."

"I'm sorry," he said, in the same hostile tone.

"I feel, further, that you are hiding a great deal."

"If I am, I can assure you that I do so for your own sake and Cathy's, far more than mine." He, too, was angry, and he had not Lady Carstairs' self-command. Very soon they would be at open war, and yet he had come there to smooth things over. "May I remind you, Lady Carstairs, that Cathy is my wife, and that I cannot allow you or anyone else to advise me as to what is best for her."

"Yes, yes," Aunt Amy drew her silk shawl around her shoulders. "I am aware of all that. I am not suggesting interference, but this mystery, this baffling attitude of refusal——"

"Take it from me, that it is better so."

She meditated carefully over what he had said, and then she spoke again.

"I should be very reluctant to adopt any course of action which would make you feel that I do not entirely trust you," she said. "It takes two to make a quarrel, Jack, but, at the same time, I cannot permit you to leave me in the dark. If you decline to tell me where my niece now is, I shall be forced to try and discover for myself. I could not do this without due warning."

"And so you have warned me—or is it a threat, Lady Carstairs?"

"Threat? What *can* you mean?" She was alarmed, and looked at him nervously.

"I mean that, when outside people begin to speak of finding out for themselves what is purely a personal matter between me and my wife, I regard it as a threat."

The bully in him began to get the upper hand, and he remembered how Lady Carstairs had spoken when he announced his engagement to Cathy. She had desired to hinder the marriage, and now he wished to God that she had succeeded, but as she had not, he intended to let her realise that her place was an insignificant one, and that she was to stay in it.

"You regarded the marriage as a mistake," he went on, with an unfriendly smile. "Possibly, because you knew Cathy better than I did *then.*"

"If you understand her," Lady Carstairs broke in, with a vague movement of her hands. "If *only* you understand her."

"It is impossible to discuss it," he replied briefly.

"I begin to agree with you. I do not wish to discuss what is only a vague generality. You ask me to accept the decision of a doctor whom I have never heard of, and who, so far as I can recall the facts, was originally brought in because no one else could be found, and you wish me to be content." Lady Carstairs rose superbly and held out her hand. "I am not content, and I shall see Monica Henstock."

Lorrimer barely touched her fingers with his. He was going to break with Cathy's people, and, when they learned that she was mad, perhaps they might feel ashamed of themselves. At present, they did not know, but some time they would have to.

"You can see Doctor Henstock," he said, fiddling with a ring on his little finger. "She will tell you nothing more than I have."

"Still, I shall see her."

"Do, if you like."

He shrugged his heavy shoulders, and Lady Carstairs looked at him closely. "I am very far from satisfied," she said, and Lorrimer checked himself in the act of replying that he was in the same boat, and that it was considerably worse for him than for her. He hated her at that moment, and his suppressed feeling of indignity and anger showed in every line of his body. They had snubbed him and made him cringe in the old days, but those days were done.

Lady Carstairs watched him go, and knew that they had parted in enmity. Something had altered Lorrimer, and he was obviously suffering from outraged feelings. She sat down and collected her thoughts. Cathy was as wild as a wood bird, and she could easily find, in this Lorrimer who had presented himself that day to Lady Carstairs' astonished eyes, an impossible husband. She felt that there was a great deal behind his allusion to Barlow, and with increasing nervousness she wondered if Cathy could have been indiscreet. That Cathy could ever act dishonourably was impossible and unthinkable, but she might have done something that inspired a man like Lorrimer with suspicion. Robert Amyas said that Lorrimer was like a policeman, and would inevitably act as one. Had he, then, decided that Cathy should be removed and locked up, merely because he suffered from jealous rage? During their interview there had been times when he looked like a driven bull.

Lady Carstairs put her handkerchief to her eyes, and dried two weak tears. It was all desperately sad, and she feared the hidden side of the story. It would be better to see Monica and find out what she had to say.

Monica was at home when Lady Carstairs arrived at her house the following day, and she came into the room with no abatement of her professional calm. She looked tired, and rather older than when they had last met, but she was deeply entrenched behind her defences. Lorrimer had rung her up and warned her what to expect, and she was prepared in advance. He was coming to see her that night, and already she was counting the hours. She had borne the brunt of the horror of the situation for his sake, and now she was going to let him off any description of it. An instinct deep within her warned her that she should take this line. Lorrimer needed peace, and if she added to his distress, the power which she exercised over him might weaken and vanish. For his sake she had done what she would otherwise never have contemplated, and the price was ghastly. There was no getting away from it, the payment had been overwhelming. Yet, was it entirely for his sake? Was there not a promise of years of untroubled unity for them beyond this present time of torture and distress?

Lady Carstairs had come to find out where Cathy was, and, true to her principle, Monica intended her to know nothing. She was Cathy's friend—in spite of all, she still held to that—and if Doctor Chapman, who had received a cheque for three months' treatment in advance, considered Cathy cured at the end of that time, she would be able to return to her friends without anyone knowing that the stigma of lunacy had been attached to her. It would be easy to tell the truth—easy, even though there would be a furious burst of indignation to greet it; and it had been a mistake to call in Doctor Luke. Monica saw that error clearly. They should have had someone well known to Lady Carstairs. She stopped abruptly, for she did not care to ask herself why Doctor Luke had been selected by Hammersly. Cathy had attempted to take her life, and almost any doctor would agree that it was the act of a woman either temporarily or permanently insane. Cathy had tried to kill herself. She had, she had, she had. There lay the righteousness of the decision which they had come to. It had nothing to say to Barlow, nothing to say to Cathy's determination to leave Lorrimer and wreck his career. Doctor Chapman made no bones about it. People who left their husbands or wives were not accounted lunatics, and all the rest was beside the point. Lorrimer's own longing for an end to the strain, the relations between him and Monica herself, all these would have availed them nothing; it was Cathy's act that made it necessary to take the step. Doctor Chapman had known nothing of the side issues, and he was satisfied.

She went into the old drawing-room, and greeted Lady Carstairs with friendly warmth, and spoke at once of Cathy.

"Dear Lady Carstairs, I can guess what brought you here. In fact, I was going to see you myself to-day."

"Then you will hide nothing—you will tell me? Monica, I place all my trust in you."

They sat on an angular sofa, hand in hand, and Monica talked with her tired energy. She gave Lady Carstairs a long and technical account of Cathy's illness, impressing upon her the need for care and quiet, and then she explained that Cathy had objected to the nurse. Cathy had broken bounds. This entailed a reference to Miss Batten, and Lady Carstairs shook her head.

"Not trustworthy, I fear—we had evidence of that already."

"In the end," Monica swerved off to the abstract, "I felt that I could do no more. Acting on my firm conviction, I advised a change of treatment, and this could only be done by a specialist."

"Of course, of course. I quite see all that."

"You are not going to be angry with me because, for a time, Cathy has to be hidden away from everyone."

"I cannot see the need for it," Lady Carstairs was intensely grieved, but she seemed tractable, "but I suppose I shall have to submit. She is happy? Monica, I need not tell you how dear Cathy has always been to me, and I felt yesterday that things were gravely wrong between her and Jack. It may have been only my imagination—I hope it was."

Monica looked out through the window at the view of a neighbouring wall, and seemed in no hurry to reply.

"There are times when Cathy can be bewildering," she said at last. "She was a little—well—headstrong."

Aunt Amy sighed. She, too, had suffered from Cathy's whims.

"Then you assure me that she *is* happy now. You saw her in this nursing home and were completely satisfied?"

"I consider the doctor in charge one of the ablest men in England," Monica replied.

She was one of those people who never tell lies, and, though the lie in its full essence was implied to Lady Carstairs, Doctor Henstock's conscience was clear. She had not said that Cathy was "happy."

And so the interview drew to its weary close and left Monica with a sense of power. She had been able to reassure Lady Carstairs, and no one else was likely to do more than talk. If Cathy's aunt, who might feel herself in a position to take some action, could be kept quiet, it was not likely that the others would continue a vague agitation. She had scotched Aunt Amy's project of going to see Doctor Luke, and it was a comfort to know that Hammersly was arranging that he should be taken as a ship's doctor on a line of which he was a director. Lorrimer had given her this information over the telephone. Luke was a wretched, drink-sodden creature, and not a colleague you might well produce to Lady Carstairs. Kingslade was to be closed for a time, and the servants, who knew nothing, were to be discharged. Jack thought of going back to his flat, and, after a little, the outside world would forget to wonder. She wished that she felt happy herself; happy and lighter of heart. Her own romance was about to come to fulfilment, and yet it gave her no real joy. There were so many things one wanted to forget utterly, and Monica had a strain of rugged fidelity in her nature. It had held her faithful to Lorrimer when he pushed her aside, and it was still there in the case of Cathy. Cathy had supplanted her, had cast her glamour over Jack Lorrimer and robbed her friend, but none the less, Monica could not put her wholly away. Monica was doomed to bear a spear in her heart. She looked at the clock and counted the hours again until he should come, and she might escape from the thrall of those awful, reproachful memories; memories she might in no way lessen by asking the man she loved to bear the burden with her.

CHAPTER XXI

Cathy had been very gay as she and Monica raced along the glorious roads in the comfortable car.

"I felt as if I was never going to be amused again as long as I lived," Cathy said. "I had lost every sense of the seasons, and the Kingslade roses didn't really smell sweet." Her eyes were full of light, and she poked Monica in the ribs. "You're as solemn as an owl. I do wish you hadn't such an active conscience."

"I begin to agree with you," Monica said reservedly, and Cathy looked out over the wide landscape towards the ever receding mystery of the horizon. She became silent, and she thought of the future with a sudden sense of chill. She thought of Lorrimer and tried to recall her old feeling of confidence. She had taken her marriage on trust and it had been happy if not ecstatic. So long as they walked together agreed, things were well for them, but it takes a deeper unity to stand the strain of diverging ideals, or sundering doubts. Cathy was fundamentally a proud woman, and though she would not have admitted it even to herself, she was aware of a small and nagging sensation of anger, since Lorrimer had selected such a man as Barlow with whom to couple her name. He believed her capable of permitting George Barlow to add her to his list of conquests.

She could not see ahead of her into the darkness of the future, and yet she desired to be generous. She was wondering how it would be best to reassure her aunt, and how she could explain the break between herself and her husband. Her health would be sufficient excuse for the outside world. And then she swung away from it all. She was to be free again, and return to the days when she had been an all too happy Cathy Rossiter. Dear days, more precious than she had guessed at the time. She would make Jack go back also.

As a punishment, he must show her that his political opinions were not tainted with a desire for personal success, and he must get rid of Hammersly. She knew that Hammersly was perpetually at Kingslade, and he was far too clever for Jack. If he were evicted, and Lorrimer caught back into the golden web which had been shot through with the colours of dreams, they might forget about George Barlow and find comfort again. It would never be quite the same, and there would be rents and tears to be mended, but the fabric was strong enough to bear a new piece in the old garment. Where shall one find the whole ideal? Perfect lover, perfect husband, perfect friend? Not in this world. Like the rest of mankind, Cathy would have to make the best of it. The air had revived her and brought a touch of colour into her cheeks, and the far sky was blue, traced over with faint nebulous clouds, filmy and fine.

But there was a doubt in her mind, and the doubt had the features and look of Lorrimer himself as he had stood there impeaching her, accusing her of hopeless vulgarity, and telling her plainly that she was a wanton, at the beck and call of a blackguard. If you hide a thing—well—you only hide it. It remains there, behind the curtain. Some day the hangings which cover it may be withdrawn again, and once more the ugly past stares out at you, no less true and menacing than it originally was. She pictured to herself the comfort of going back to Aunt Amy. Places we have known and loved, as well as people, have a way of tendering a welcome to returned wanderers, and Cathy ached for the lost surroundings of her life. Life was now devoid of love and contentment, and even more utterly devoid of its first essential, liberty.

The car was taking them along a wide road, sheltered by tall trees in deep leaf, and flickering splashes of sunlight lit the green shade. On the right, there ran a high wall encircling a demesne of some importance, and Cathy shook free of her thoughts and spoke again.

"I hate these barricades, Mug. Seclusion is all very well, but it seems so grudging to enclose oneself in walls of that size, and, look, they have spikes and glass along the top. What curmudgeons the owners must be."

Monica's eyes had become tense, and she stiffened her body, but she made no reply, and after a minute the car approached the high entrance gates to the demesne, which opened automatically at their coming as though they were expected, revealing a wide, well-kept sweep of gravel drive.

"We are going in?" Cathy leaned forward. "It's like enchantment. What a funny place, Muggins. Is this your Grange? Have you brought me to some fairy place where we shall be waited upon by bodiless hands, like the prince in the old story?"

"It is the Grange," Monica said, in a voice which sounded slightly breathless and unsteady. "It is a beautiful place."

Cathy reflected for a moment. "Somewhere about here there is a lunatic asylum. I remember having heard of it. Don't let us go near it, Mug; the very idea of it haunts one. I can't remember what I heard," she thought again. "Yes, I do. It was Cécile Sheridan who spoke of it. She came there to sing to the poor, doomed creatures, and, as the day was hot, she tried to open a window, and it only opened four inches. It gave one an idea of the place, which I never forgot."

"Don't think of it now," Monica said hurriedly; "don't, Cathy." She gripped Cathy's hand with nervous fingers. "You may blame me dreadfully later on," she said, speaking as though impelled to utter the words; "but always try to remember that I acted for the best."

"We've said all that, Mug," Cathy tried to reassure her. "I shan't think of it again. Is this the house? I suppose we shall lunch in the grounds. Why, there are quite a lot of people out there on the grass. They are watching a cricket match." She broke off and would have taken the speaking tube, "Jakes is taking us to the house; I suppose he doesn't understand."

"I have to stop here and see someone; a Doctor Chapman," Monica said, taking Cathy by the wrist. "I may not be long, but you had better come in and wait."

"Well, don't be long. And who is Dr. Chapman?" Cathy looked at Monica, and suddenly she spoke with great feeling. "Mug, *this* is the asylum, and you have not told me Why couldn't you come some other day? I hate the idea of the place and I don't think I can come in and wait. Leave me in the car, and do hurry. Let us get away from here."

"That is sheer nerves," Monica said, but she avoided Cathy's wide-eyed stare of horror. "What possible harm could it do you to wait in the house? I told you I should not be long."

"Promise me that we shall go away at once," Cathy said, and a shiver caught her. "It makes we wretched. Perhaps there are people here who are as sane as you or I. Janey Greenaway said that the Lunacy Laws were iniquitous, and that they should be reformed. She told me that you could be shut in without even knowing who it was who had you sent there."

"There are heaps of safeguards," Monica said abruptly. "There are the Commissioners in Lunacy who visit these places and see the patients. No one is kept here without reason, and Doctor Chapman is wonderfully clever and very kind."

"What an awful thing it is to be a doctor," Cathy laughed in spite of herself. "No one but a doctor would dream of motoring through a place like this on a summer day. I do think that you are blunted."

The car drew up before a flight of stone steps, and the great house towered up before them. It was a fine, spacious building, and the trailing creepers which clothed it swayed scented blossoms to the warm air. There was no sign of age or decay about it; prosperity was its master note, and cheerfulness was insistent in the shining brass, the flowering window boxes, and the polished gleam of rows and rows of windows. It looked like an expensive hydro, and Cathy saw a nurse in blue uniform flit past the open door. She was interested in spite of herself, and a tinge of curiosity coloured her repugnance when Doctor Chapman came down the steps and welcomed his colleague.

Doctor Chapman was a man of about forty, with an easy manner and strong, hard eyes. He was dressed in a light suit, and he looked intensely and emphatically sane. His rather florid good looks irritated Cathy slightly, yet she responded when she was introduced, because she saw in him a man with unusual knowledge of secret things, and she wondered if she could ask him if Janey's stories were founded on fact. The "Danielli crowd" were credulous in some ways, and Cathy herself had a firm conviction that the evidence of men or women who might have been insane was hardly the basis for unqualified belief.

Doctor Chapman stood bare-headed in the sunshine, and Monica introduced her friend. Cathy held out her hand and smiled.

"I don't think I want to come in," she said; "my imagination may play tricks with me if I do."

"You need not fear anything," Doctor Chapman replied. "Perhaps you have been reading 'Valentine Vox' or 'Hard Cash'? We have left those days far behind us, Mrs. Lorrimer."

He helped her out of the car and Cathy looked around her.

"It is all too dreadfully cheerful," she said, "and too normal. Ordinary houses have raggy bits and aren't so frightfully bland." She turned again to Monica and began to walk up the steps. "If you and Doctor Chapman stay too long, I shall get into the car and make Jakes take me to the gate. Oh! that gate of yours," she spoke to the doctor who had been watching her with an indulgent smile, "it is uncanny."

"Nothing uncanny here," he said, as they stood in the wide gloom of the hall, and, opening a door into a small boudoir, he led Cathy through, with the same excessive politeness.

"Sit and rest," he said, and Cathy turned again to Monica.

"Mug, I don't like staying here, I'll wait outside." She could not tell why fear had sprung upon her, and she held out her hands, but Monica said nothing, and Doctor Chapman smiled again at her and waved Doctor Henstock out, closing the door behind him.

Cathy sat down in a deep, comfortable chair, and looked around her. The room was papered with a gay design of birds in green branches. Not wild birds, but birds who had, she thought, something fundamentally wrong with them. Cathy decided that she did not like them in the least. The window was a little open, and she did not attempt to try whether the sash could be raised. Cécile had told her about those very windows, and the idea was in itself a shudder. Why had Mug been so stupid as to bring her there at all? It was enough to spoil the whole pleasure of the day. If she really believed in all this bunkum about "nerves," it was the last place she should have selected. Cathy looked around her again. A clock ticked on the mantelpiece, and quiet was everywhere. The inmates were evidently out, or they kept extremely quiet, and then, as though to contradict her thoughts, a distant scream rent the air, tearing the silence to tatters. It was not repeated, but it froze the soul of Cathy Rossiter. She sprang to her feet. Why should she stay in this false, smug sitting-room, which pretended that it was a place of rest, when, in reality, it was an annexe to a hidden house of torment. The car was outside, waiting at the foot of the steps, and she could stay there, if Monica was going to be longer—she had been long enough already. Cathy felt she could not bear to hear a repetition of that awful scream. She ran to the door, and to her surprise she discovered that there was no handle on the inner side, so that she was virtually a prisoner. A hot wave of discomfort swept over her, and she stood undecided what to do.

Probably Monica had been induced to go and see some specially horrible case, that would account for the delay. Doors in lunatic asylums were different to any other doors, and there was nothing in all this to make her heart beat fast and painfully, but there was the sensation of being caged in, which might not be reasoned with. The room was full of sunlight, and the window would only open to the regulation four inches, top and bottom. Cathy tried it and found this to be the case. She told herself that she must keep quiet. There is always some wild power underneath steady surface control which can break out, even in the most normal of human beings, and Cathy battled against her own desire for violent action. She was no prisoner. She was only waiting until Muggins had finished her long, drawn-out confabulation with the asylum doctor. There was nothing at all to distress her; one must grip tight to facts. The wave of fear passed and receded and she sat down again.

To-morrow she would be able to tell the story and laugh at it, because of her own panic.

Still the time ticked on, with irritating monotony. The scream had not been repeated, and Cathy began to wonder if she had imagined it.

But it isn't pleasant to sit in a room which you cannot leave, and Cathy's imagination began to play her tricks. She recalled a scene in "Justice," a scene which had bitten into her memory. It had all been acted in dumb show. Instead of a gay boudoir, the surroundings were those of a prison cell, and she saw the tortured figure of the solitary man, pacing the narrow space. The window was high over his head, and he had lifted his hands so that he could touch the stone sill below the bars, and, far away, there had been the sound of others, in a like case, beating against their closed doors. The struggle had been desperate; and at last, overpowered by the agony of his desire to escape, he, too, had thrown himself against the door and beaten upon it, crying wildly.

Here, all around her, there was mystery; uncanny and vile, and she stared through the window at the sleepy, softly-shaped clouds, brooding gently over this mad place, where emotions were unrestrained and rabid. She knew that she was frightened by the atmosphere of the place, and she began to wonder whether one of these poor, sad creatures might break in upon her. The idea of it turned her cold, and she got up and went to the door.

It was positively unkind of Muggins to keep her there so long. Muggins, who made a ridiculous fuss about her health, was now ignoring the strain she put on Cathy's nerves. Now, it was over half an hour since she had been waved into the room with that full, sweeping gesture by Doctor Chapman, and there was not a sound or sign from outside. There was no bell in the room, and Cathy knocked on the panels of the door. If anyone, one of the nurses, or an attendant going down the corridor heard her, they might come to her rescue. The desire to get out was growing overpoweringly strong, and, from knocking gently, Cathy began to hammer with her fists. She was not in any way out of control, but she was angry. Muggins had been utterly inconsiderate, and, if she did raise a commotion, she hardly cared. The place, with its soulless cheerfulness, was as odious to her as a charnel house, and she struck at the door, bruising her hands with the force she used. But no one answered her, no one had heard, perhaps? Or was it that such sounds were all too common to be regarded?

The immediate surroundings walled even her own thoughts, and she sat down once more and tried to imagine what it would be like to be back with Aunt Amy again. Robert Amyas would come and see her at once. Robert, with his queer, ironic laugh and his faultless taste in clothes. His mind was full of surprises, and Cathy felt that it would be exciting and stimulating to have him to talk to again. Ten more minutes had dragged by. What would Jack think of his impeccable Monica's conduct? If he knew that she had taken her to an asylum and left her locked up in a hateful room with scores of ridiculous birds all up the wall he would be angry.

It was a blessed thing to be a man, and have a man's strength. Lorrimer could have broken the lock with a kick, and flung the polite and vivacious Doctor Chapman down his own front steps, but a woman could do nothing. There was no way of telling what one could do. People knew they should tuck up their legs in a railroad accident, and, if the chimney went on fire, you got wet sacking from somewhere and stopped the draught. For all the ordinary disasters of life there was some simple principle by which you acted at once, but when you found yourself in a room with no way to get out of it, what *did* you do?

Cathy sprang to her feet again and hammered at the door, and then, pressing her mouth to the crack, she called:

"Let me out, please. Let me out."

Her words reached Monica, who was crossing the hall with Doctor Chapman, and she stood still.

"It's Cathy," she said in a low, rapid voice; "she is frightened."

Doctor Chapman glanced over his shoulder and signed to an attendant to remain in readiness, and went on talking to Doctor Henstock.

"She has no idea of the condition she is in, and already, you see, she is showing hysterical symptoms. If she were normal again, dear lady, as you have more or less suggested she might be, she would not be making all that noise. However, we are well used to these outbursts, and in a day or two I can report to you and Colonel Lorrimer whether she is really sufficiently insane to make it necessary for her to remain here."

Monica stood transfixed, for the beating upon the door became suddenly urgent. Cathy had heard voices.

"She is my greatest friend," she said, catching Doctor Chapman by the sleeve, "I can't say what this has cost me."

"Be assured that you have acted for the best," he replied kindly. He was sorry for her, but time had made him well accustomed to poignant scenes with relatives. People came secretly, and they were ashamed to be there. Lunacy was not a disease like any other, but was a dreadful stigma, a blot upon a family record. Something which must be hushed up, because it was unnatural and hideous. There was frequently fear, mixed in with the other feelings he was accustomed to see unveiled, and, as Monica was no relation to Cathy, he thought her a sympathetic and affectionate woman, and he wished to send her away reassured.

"You must not see her again," he said firmly. "If she feels that you are responsible for her detention here, she might become violent. I think you have acted with the greatest tact and forethought, and, after all," he patted her hand, "it is by no means a hopeless case. It may conceivably be a short term of treatment for her."

Monica looked up at him. "Good-bye," she said slowly. "I hope all will be well. Do you think," she looked at him desperately again, "that she will ever forgive me?"

"When she returns to her full sanity," he nodded, and smiled. "She will then realise all she owes to you, Doctor Henstock."

He saw her into the car, and Jakes looked curiously at her.

"Drive me to the station," she said, as Doctor Chapman folded the rug about her knees.

"And to come back for——"

"You are to drive Doctor Henstock to the station," Doctor Chapman said firmly, and the car started as he stood in the gay sunlight watching his colleague's departure. He then turned towards the house again, with no abatement of his cheerful manner, and spoke to the female attendant who was waiting in the hall.

"The patient seems excitable," he said, polishing his glasses. "She will be placed in the Infirmary Ward for the present." And then he turned the handle and walked into the sitting-room.

CHAPTER XXII

At his coming Cathy fell back, and stood divided in mind whether to be angry at having been kept there so long, or whether, now that it was over, only to laugh at it all. She was so instantly relieved by the sight of Doctor Chapman that she chose the easier course, and smiled, her quick, lavish smile. She looked tossed and untidy but very beautiful, and Doctor Chapman was aware that life is full of cruelty. This radiant woman, who had all the world could offer of happiness and hope, was more pathetic than any obscure lunatic who spat and jibbered and shouted blasphemies. Yet there it was. She had tried to take her life and she was mad. He had not studied the subject for years without knowing, if the hidden seed of insanity was once to come to growth, that very little divided Cathy from these others, though at the moment she looked as fair as the day beyond the windows.

"I thought you were never coming," she said, looking for Monica over his shoulder. "I suppose when you get two doctors talking they are as bad as golfers, or two men who once served in the same division in France. I banged on your door, Doctor Chapman," she nursed her hands ruefully; "what a perfectly hateful thing it is to feel shut in."

Doctor Chapman looked at her steadily.

"Will you come with me now?" he said, and something in the way he spoke startled her slightly.

"Where to?" she asked. "Is Doctor Henstock waiting?"

"Doctor Henstock has gone," he said quietly.

"Gone. But—I don't really understand you." She looked from his face to the composed face of the attendant. "She cannot have gone away and left me here? How soon will she be back?"

"She is not coming back." He advanced a few steps and put a cool, firm hand on her wrist. "Ask no questions, Mrs. Lorrimer; do not excite yourself in any way. What has been done is for your own good."

Cathy stared at him and shook her head. What was the matter with the man?

"I have to go to London," she said, in her usual gracious, easy way. "Perhaps my friend did not explain this. Why she should have left me here I can't think, but as she has, can you send some one to order me a taxi, or something to take me to the station?"

"Sit down a moment," Doctor Chapman said. He was a master of tact and discretion, so long as either could be used, and he was doing what he could to soften the blow.

"I think I won't sit down," Cathy objected; "I really am in a hurry."

She was sorely angered by Monica's inexplicable conduct, but she felt she should not visit it upon the innocent Doctor Chapman's head.

"You are not leaving here," he went on. "Be calm, Mrs. Lorrimer, please be calm. Doctor Henstock, in conjunction with another doctor, decided that treatment was necessary for you which you can only have in a mental hospital, such as this."

Cathy flickered her eyelids and grasped the back of a chair with her hands. He had told her something, this suave and determined looking man, but the meaning of his words still escaped her. She only looked at him and grew very pale.

"They agreed—that poor, battered Doctor Luke and Monica—that I was ill? In what way?" Light was dawning upon her slowly. "You don't mean, Doctor Chapman—you *can't* mean, that they decided that I am mad?" She watched him with wide, terrified eyes. "Oh no, it's ridiculous." She rallied herself again. "And besides, Monica is my friend, she is open as the day, she could not have betrayed me."

"I must remind you," he said gravely, "that you attempted to take your life."

"That is untrue." Cathy drew herself up. "Will you please let me use the telephone. I must speak to my husband at once and tell him to come here, if you will not permit me to leave."

"Colonel Lorrimer will do nothing," Doctor Chapman replied. "It is with his full consent—more than that, that you are here."

"Jack believes me to be insane?"

Doctor Chapman took her hands and pushed her gently into a chair; she was trembling violently and he thought she might fall.

"Beyond the act of murder, there is nothing which is so great an outrage upon the law of God and man, as suicide," he said, holding her with his eyes. "It is an offence against the law, and one for which you could be tried in a public court. You disregarded the law, Mrs. Lorrimer, and both your husband and your friend have taken the gentlest means in their power to protect you from the result of your own act."

"Muggins and Jack," Cathy looked blindly before her, and her hands moved vaguely. "So that is it? They took the 'gentlest' way."

"They did." Doctor Chapman repeated his assertion.

"That overdose was a mistake," Cathy did not look at him, she seemed to be talking more to herself. "No one ever really doubted that except Nurse Binns, and then they sent for Doctor Luke. What did he do?" She put her hands over her face. "Let me think, please. Doctor Luke came and talked to me about suicide, but he didn't accuse me. That would have put me on my guard, perhaps. Jack went away. I suppose it's easier to go than to have the courage to see a human being sent to hell." She laughed suddenly. "It took my friend, Doctor Henstock's nerve to stand the sight of so much treachery." She looked up again, and her eyes were haggard. "What are you really telling me?" she asked. "I can't understand you. You see, I have only just come to know that two people I believed in are traitors."

"Don't excite yourself," he said, in a warning voice. "Remember that a nervous breakdown leaves you very weak. For the present, you are in my charge. You will be very happy here. The length of time it may be necessary for you to remain here depends largely on yourself."

"How so, if I am a mad woman?"

"Your nerves will gradually become rested, and you will return to a normal sense of life," he went on kindly.

Cathy looked wildly around her. The dark flood of comprehension was drowning her in its inrushing tide.

"Oh, is it true?" she rocked herself in her chair. "Is it true? What have I ever done to either of them that they should treat me so? I would have gone away, I was to have gone, and if only they had been fair to me. . . . But to do this—to do this. . . ."

"Soon you will regard it very differently," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder, and signing to the attendant. "I want you to go with Mrs. Ridge. It is not all as unusual as you imagine."

"Is it not?" Cathy looked at him with strange eyes. "Not really unusual? To be lied to, cajoled, and betrayed? Are there others here who have suffered so?"

"We are not an unhappy little community," he said, taking her arms and raising her to her feet, "but any defiance of discipline, or any sign of violence has to be dealt with—dealt with." He could feel how terribly she trembled. "I assure you again, Mrs. Lorrimer, that much depends upon yourself. Mrs. Ridge will now take you to your room, and you must do as you are told." He smiled reassuringly.

"Don't let me see mad people," Cathy grasped the lapels of his coat, "I could not bear it."

She clung to him, and he put his hands upon hers and released himself quietly. The attendant, Mrs. Ridge, was watching her with a careful, measuring eye. She was a large, heavily-built woman with arms like a blacksmith.

"Quietly," he said. "Quietly, Mrs. Lorrimer. You must take life very easily for the present. Think of yourself."

Cathy drew away, and she laughed wildly again.

"Of myself? I have a great deal else to think of. The world has changed within five minutes, Doctor Chapman. Five minutes ago I believed in two people who were closest to me, and now I see them for what they really are. They have taken my freedom, and it would have been a cleaner thing to take my life. You call me mad, and . . . *they* have done this to me."

"Take Mrs. Lorrimer away," Doctor Chapman said in his unruffled voice, smooth as sealing-wax; "she needs attention."

Walking like a woman in a dream, Cathy followed the attendant out of the room, every detail of which was eternally stamped upon her mind.

"Please call me Miss Rossiter," she said, suddenly awaking to life again. "I shall never again call myself by any other name," and Mrs. Ridge did not press the point.

She was conducted through endless corridors, where no one seemed to be about except a few attendants, and she heard Mrs. Ridge speak to one of these, and tell her that she was to be her "special." A number of doors were unlocked as they passed, and shut automatically, and at last they reached a wide ward, from which a number of cubicles opened, and Cathy was shown into one and told that for the present she was to remain there.

She gazed around her and sat down on a small bed. The first spic and span effect of the place was no longer evident, and the room was dingy and bare. One window which could only be opened two inches, with heavy shutters, overlooked a garden. A few things which had been packed into her small dressing-bag were arranged upon the mean dressing-table, and again there was no handle on the inner side of the door. The room was incredibly stuffy and close, and Cathy got up from the bed and walked to the window. She was still too numb to think of anything but Jack and Monica, and the thought of her own condition hardly touched her. They had put her here; she who believed in them, and they were outside and free. By means unknown to her, the thing had been done, and she was a captive. She had played into their hands, and with secret satisfaction, they had watched her give herself away. At that hour, it came to her clearly and without shadow of doubt, that Monica desired to be rid of Lorrimer's wife, and that he had consented. Her face grew ravaged with the agony of her thoughts. They had met and discussed the chances, called in a poor paid ally who could be trusted to do as he was bidden, and in this secret way they had snatched their liberty, their vile right to be free of her. Thoughts pursued one another through her brain. She had told Monica that she would get a separation from Jack. Surely that should have satisfied their rapacity? Yet no, there was Lorrimer's career! Respectability must be maintained at all costs. Bigamists, men who murdered their wives, so that they could remarry; all the suffocated, wretched people who "kept up appearances" were the sacrifice exacted by the dreadful god who went clad in a black coat and was punctilious as to the observance of Sunday. Yes, and respectability had its victims in lunatic asylums. A lunatic usually defies respectability and the respectable, and so once you are in, you don't get out. She was the burnt-offering. Again she stared around her and tried to realise where she was. A woman in a black dress and white cuffs opened the door which Cathy had closed when she came up, looked at her inquisitively and retired, leaving the door wide open and fixing a catch so as to prevent its being shut.

Cathy had been standing with her back to the window, and she turned and leaned her arms on the sash. If only she could forget for even five minutes and come back to herself. Monica had kissed her several times that day, the Judas kiss of betrayal. Monica, who had known her and her ways for years, could not really believe her to be mad. Her eyes traversed the garden, and a cold stab of disgust struck her suddenly and outside things regained their power once more. She was hearing sounds again and seeing what lay around her, in horrible proximity. In the sunny garden, under the flowering trees, a number of people were collected, and it was at these that Cathy looked with strained, horrified eyes. The patients were out, and they presented a ghastly picture.

For the most part they were old women, respectably clad in dingy garments of antiquated fashion, and they moved, not in any orderly manner, but in erratic darts and rushes and gathered into knots, and dispersed again. One woman, who gabbled and made faces continually, had her own face half covered by a black bandage. She was the victim of some revolting skin disease, which made her seamed face hideous, apart from the madness in her eyes. She saw Cathy at the window and waved and nodded to her, but what she said Cathy could not hear. With a touch of aloof disdain, the attendants watched the group of patients, speaking sharply now and then, and talking to each other. To-and-fro they moved about aimlessly, and there was never a moment when they were still. Among the others, there was one young girl of about nineteen, who looked frightened and lost, like some bewildered child who had strayed into a place of the damned.

Did Monica know that she was to consort with this wretched herd? Cathy asked the question, and the response came quickly. Monica knew perfectly well. She also knew the effect it might have upon Cathy. She threw herself on her knees on the floor and covered her face with her arms. Was there any use in praying to God to keep her sane?

Her name was called from the door, and Cathy raised her head. "Please speak to me as Miss Rossiter," she said, and the attendant smiled and said that she would, certainly, if she wished it. She seemed a kindly and well-disposed girl, with the same huge build as Mrs. Ridge, and she asked Cathy if she would like a bath.

"Not now," Cathy said miserably, "I take my bath in the morning. Do go away. I have so much to think about."

"Oh, come and have a bath after your long drive," the girl repeated, with a touch of homely familiarity. "It will do you good; take your thoughts off other things."

Cathy sighed and rose to her feet. There was some truth in what the attendant said, and she followed her quietly.

She was taken to a bath-room at the end of the ward, which held about twenty baths, and the attendant explained that she must not leave her, but would help her to undress. As she let down Cathy's long, thick hair, she admired it profusely, and plaited it into a chaplet which she bound round her head.

"You do look nice," she said encouragingly. "If you weren't so sad. Cheer up a bit; the doctors like bright faces."

"Then they don't often go to watch that astonishing parade outside my window," Cathy said. "You don't really believe that I am—like those others?"

"Oh, they're old people," the girl replied, pulling off Cathy's stockings. "Don't take them to heart. You couldn't have them prancing about all over the place, could you, now? Probably you'll be sent to Ward I soon."

"My God!" Cathy pressed her hands over her heart. "How long shall I be here—in this part of the asylum?"

The girl was quite ready to give Cathy any information she could, and from her she learned that Dr. Chapman was the superintendent, and lived in a house in the grounds, only coming into the wards occasionally. Otherwise, Doctor Bracy, the resident doctor, looked after the women patients.

"What sort of treatment does one get?" Cathy asked haltingly. "What do they *do* to all of them?"

"Do? Why, nothing. You can't do anything," the girl replied. "There now," she pulled aside a curtain, "get off your things and have your bath."

"Then it is a prison, not a hospital," Cathy said, looking at the girl. "If nothing is done, it amounts to that."

"I don't know anything about it. Get into your bath, like a good soul."

"But must you stay?" Cathy said. "Surely I can have my bath without witnesses? Can't you go outside the door?"

Another attendant arrived as she spoke, a tall woman with a cold face and narrow eyes. She was carrying a notebook and a pencil.

"I must make my report," she said briefly. "Have you any marks or scars?"

"I refuse to undress myself," Cathy said, drawing back against the wall.

Her eyes flamed with anger, and she stood there defiantly.

"I do not want to use force," the new attendant said. "But I warn you that, if necessary, force will be used."

They took her clothes from her, and Cathy stood before them feeling that the last rag of decency had been swept away. Her white skin was devoid of blemish, but she felt that never again would she be clear of the touch of those searching hands. At last she broke out into speech.

"It is not you who do this to me," she said, her eyes filled with tears as she spoke. "They were too cowardly, those who sent me here; but it is they who have stripped me of everything."

"Now, get into your bath," the woman with the close set eyes said briefly. "I did not expect scars. It was a drug case."

She dropped her notebook, which was hung by a steel chain to her waist, and turned away, neither interested nor moved by her task.

Cathy slid into the warm water and sat looking at the girl, who seemed intensely sorry for her, and was leaving.

"You need not go," she said in a flat voice. "That is over. It's been done, and for you to go now is not necessary." A sob caught her voice, and the girl held up an admonishing finger. "Don't cry, whatever you do," she said; "you can be kept for ever in the infirmary if you are hysterical. It's lovely in Ward I, and you'll be as happy as a queen once you get there."

Cathy breathed with difficulty, and fought down her sobs. It was no use to cry, no use—worse, far worse than useless. In utter silence she got out of her bath, and came through the curtains where her clothes had been folded when she took them off. They were gone, and a nightgown, taken from her bag, was lying over the chair.

"Am I to go to bed?" she said, "but it's quite early. Why can I not dress and go out?"

"Not until the resident doctor has made his report. If he thinks fit, you may go out to-morrow."

She wrapped Cathy in her silk dressing-gown, and, taking her by the arm, led her back to the stifling little room which overlooked the airing court, as it was called.

"I'll bring you some soup," the attendant said, and she helped Cathy into the small bed as she spoke, when a loud knocking was heard on the window.

"What is that, oh what is that?" Cathy asked desperately.

"Go away." The attendant, whose name, Cathy found later, was Agnes, walked to the window and waved her hand. "Don't come here making noises. It's only one of the patients," she said, "you can't keep them off. They want to be in bed all the time, and they're envying you."

Cathy hid her face in the pillow. She was an object of envy at that moment. What depth of torture it suggested to think such a thing possible.

But again she was disturbed by the return of the attendant, who was carrying something that looked like an official paper.

"What is it for?" Cathy asked stupidly, as she took it in her hands; "I don't understand."

Agnes looked at her with a suggestion of pity.

"If you want to see a magistrate, you must fill up this form," she explained.

Cathy raised her startled eyes. "A magistrate! Why should I want to see one?"

The attendant was kind, and began to explain as though she were speaking to a child.

"It's like this," she said patiently. "If you have an idea that you're not satisfied, the law is that you can tell a magistrate all you feel about it, and if he agrees, why, out you go. There now."

Cathy stared at Agnes; she was gradually beginning to understand that she was a bringer of good tidings.

After all, it was simple enough, and certainly Agnes was not fooling her; she looked too honest for that.

"Then I can really do this?" she said with growing courage. "Oh, Agnes, you have made me happy. Of course I will sign it, and I know what I have to say to him."

She took the pen from the attendant's hand, and signed her name in the place indicated, and Agnes folded up the paper and nodded encouragement, as she went out through the open door.

Again she was left alone, and Cathy tried to think of something other than Jack and Monica. She must think, she told herself, because, unless one did, there was no way by which one could make any plan. The urgent necessity was to see the nearest magistrate and get out of the horror-stricken place before her sanity was destroyed; if she could think only of the cruel wrong which had been done to her, she would have neither the courage nor the wit to face the far more pressing question. She must cease to go over the events which had led her to this home of lost souls, and strive to see some way by which she could escape. The two who had sent her there were in the open world where people went by along the streets, and where you were not stripped naked and then pushed into a prison cell, doomed to the stupid, aimless, so-called "treatment," which, it appeared, meant only detention; being held away, among men and women of diseased mind. The sunlight was falling on the smoke-grimed trees of Lady Carstairs' garden and the water splashing in the leaden fountain, just as it had years ago, those ages and æons back, when Cathy Rossiter used to sit there. Just as it would to-morrow and the next day, and the day after, when Cathy was slipping away from clean, sane things, and falling into the black abyss of nameless terror.

Again the knocking was repeated at the window, and a face was pressed against the class. A dull, witless face, devoid of any gleam of intelligence, and Cathy heard a querulous, wailing voice crying to her to let her in and let her sleep. Did anyone really sleep in this inferno?

Cathy sat up in bed with both hands to her heart. She had only been there a little over two hours, but what had become of time? She fell on her arms again and buried her face. If she cried, there was the threat of endless torture in the infirmary. Again and again she climbed the mountain of misery which walled her in, and tried to grasp at any hope or comfort, but her world had slipped into chaos; she was lost in the sudden, impenetrable darkness of it all.

The weary day dragged on to evening, and the hot blaze of sunlight shifted from her window until the room became dark, and Cathy did not stir nor weep. There was a house-doctor who would visit her sometime, and she must placate him. In other days she had exercised a kind of right divine over the men she met, and she felt that if there had been any reality in her power, she must use it afresh, use it as she had never wittingly done, because in that man's hands lay the keys of life or death for her. Lorrimer and Monica were probably together by now, and they would have a story ready to satisfy Lady Carstairs. "Cathy is mad. We had to lock her up." And then word would go round gradually, until people all knew that she was mad, and no one would ever again credit anything she had to say. Lady Carstairs might be heartbroken, but she would believe the lie—who was there who would not? Cathy's fingers pressed hard against her temples. Twyford? He would surely not accept it as a fact. Robert? She thought of him with a sudden rush of something closely akin to love. Robert, if all the rest of the world threw the word at her like a stone, would stand by her. He had a great pity somewhere under his superficial, cynical way, and he could be trusted if only he knew where she was. Amyas had known what Lorrimer was from the first, he had caught sight of the beast in him, so discreetly and carefully hidden away from all the rest. It helped her a little to think of him, and she turned towards the memories of the past, holding them to her with tender hands.

But the quiet was soon broken, and the patients began to troop in for dinner. The girl Cathy had seen from the window, stood at the door, rolling her eyes wildly, as a line of wretched creatures passed on, singing or bawling, and snatching at each other. The girl came to Cathy's bed.

"Why are you here?" she said, and sat down on Cathy's bed. She was carrying large knitting pins, and she worked violently. "What did you do? Did you try to murder anybody?" Cathy shrank away terrified by her close proximity and the wild eyes.

"You have a kind face; I don't think you are bad."

"Now, Miss Hepworth, be careful," her attendant spoke sharply from the door, and the girl cowered down at once.

"I was only asking her what she did. We've all done something, Maggy, or we wouldn't be here."

"Let her stay," Cathy said, seized with a sudden pity which conquered her fear as she saw her being pulled away. "She will do me no harm."

But the woman only took her visitor by the arm and pulled her out, leaving the door wide open.

The girl addressed as Miss Hepworth, broke into violent sobbing, and Cathy saw her go down the open ward, which was now crowded with inmates.

The sight that Cathy saw was an awful one, and the air was full of uncouth noises, as one old patient farther down the ward was being forcibly fed. At eight o'clock lights were turned on, and Cathy had finished her own meal. A sense of defeat overtook Cathy, and she lay quite still, conscious that a rage of fever was throbbing in her veins. Somehow the minutes dragged past, and the hour came when the patients had to be got to bed. There was one patient in a straight-jacket, who was allotted the bed next to that of the weeping girl, and old, withered women were undressed like children, to an accompaniment of frequent slappings. They broke into scolding or tears, they pleaded desperately with their wardresses, and at times they turned fierce and screamed and cursed. "Ye filthy bitch" was one of the less violent terms they chose, and yet they had all once been decent people.

It was as though Cathy had been taken and shown a chamber in hell. The utter indecency, the obscenity and the filthiness of it all rose rank and vile, and still she lay transfixed, watching, always watching. At last the house-doctor came. He was a short man, with a heavy red face and humorous eyes. Cathy watched him eagerly as he went up the ward, and cast a casual glance around him. He looked as though, outside the Asylum, he might be a kind, good-natured, unintelligent type of man. He had obviously no imagination, and he received the abuse with which some of the patients greeted him with cheerful indifference. Others were slavish and fawning and appeared to desire to curry favour by telling tales and abasing themselves to him. He was very quick about his business, and what he could possibly have learned as to the state of any individual case Cathy could not imagine.

When he came to the door of her cubicle he smiled, and said, "Well, and how are we?" and Cathy gathered her resources for an effort.

"Can't I be given a room away from here?" she asked, leaning on her arm and looking up at him with her wonderful eyes. "They are rather noisy, Doctor Bracy, and I don't sleep very well."

"Now, now; now, now," he put his hands in the pockets of his sporting coat. "Don't begin by finding fault. It's a mistake."

"Would *you* like to have to sleep here?" she asked.

"They will sleep," he nodded his head towards the ward. "The night won't be noisy. Now let me have a look at you." The attendant with the notebook had joined him. Cathy tried not to tremble as he felt her pulse.

"How do you know whether I am mad or not?" she asked.

"Now, now, my lady," he almost winked at her, "I thought that question would come."

"Yes, but how?"

"I could show you patients here," he went on, "as sane as I am myself, so long as you don't hit on one subject. They have their weak link—you have yours."

"But I did not wish to kill myself. The overdose was sheer accident."

Doctor Bracy began to hum a rag-time tune, and he made no reply.

Cathy saw that he intended to leave her, and she spoke again.

"I *must* sleep," she said desperately.

"Well, so you will. It's early yet, and you are probably accustomed to different hours."

"Can't you give me something to make sure?"

He looked at her blandly and seemed secretly amused.

"Mrs. Lorrimer, I may as well tell you, as you asked me for an instance to prove that you are insane; what you have said is substantial proof. A desire for sleep is a symptom well known to the medical world."

Cathy clasped her hands on her knees.

"Then every one is mad," she said, and she felt that she must break into helpless tears. "Either I was always a lunatic, and should have been treated as one, or I am sane. How am I to keep sane in this vile, terrifying place? Look at those women," she pointed to the ward where a patient was fighting with one of the wardresses. "Am I to see these sights and hear these sounds until my own self-respect gives way, and I, too, scream and say filthy things? Oh, no, Doctor Bracy, no; don't let this happen to me." She flung herself half out of her bed and grasped his hands.

"I am sorry for you," he said, not unkindly, and he put her back in her wretched bed again. "I think at the end of a week, if you behave yourself, you may be moved into Ward I."

"I am allowed to see a magistrate," she said, falling back upon the hope held out to her by the law. "Can I do this at once?"

"You can, certainly," he agreed, "as soon as you are a little better."

He left her without further comment, and the door was closed, and Cathy was once more a prisoner. The night and darkness were before her, and her dread of both doubled once she was alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

After a time the ward grew comparatively quiet, and the sounds trailed off into silence. Cathy herself slept in a few exhausted snatches, troubled with terrifying dreams. Sleep had no blessing to bring to such a place, and when she awoke, dripping with perspiration and conscious of wild alarm, the dense darkness was full of menace to her. The realisation that she was in a mad-house with no hope of escape drove out all other thoughts.

She sprang out of bed, but the door was securely fastened, and whatever noise it was which had awakened her, began again. After a moment, she located the sound. It was coming from what were possibly the padded cells, at the farther side of the court-yard where she had seen the drifting herd of lunatics that afternoon. A voice, so loud that it hardly appeared human, was shouting to the night, and crying persistently, "Mary, Mother of God."

Cathy hammered on the door; she could not be left alone with this new torture. It seemed to her as though the crying came storming through the world, a lonely voice echoing and echoing onwards as she remembered she had been told that sound echoed endlessly and never really ceased. Was it the voice of one woman or the voice of all the wretched souls gathered under that fell roof, weeping its fantastic griefs to the skies? She put her hands over her ears and crouched down on the floor, but she could not shut out the sound. Was it never going to cease? It stopped quite suddenly, and the relief was inexpressible. She felt it might be over, and thinking again of how much depended upon her getting some sleep, she went back to her bed and lay down, but not to rest, for once more the cry rang out, farther off, it seemed, as though the woman had been moved away from the first point, but the shriek was wilder and less controlled, though more distant. Again the pause was repeated, and again the crying followed the silence, from a still more distant place. The uncertainty and the mental picture of the wild creature being dragged from place to place gripped her heart, and Cathy threw herself out of her bed. How could she sleep in such a place as this?

Again and again she hammered on the door, and then at last she lay exhausted by the window. No one was coming to her, and she must bear it all alone; alone in a place where sins of some nameless kind were conceived in the distorted minds of the inmates. The misery of her own state drove her mind away from the sound for a time, and she knelt, leaning forward on her hands, staring at the windowed square of dim light. Madness was having its carousal, and the driven sense of desperation increased in its strength. What if she were never to get out? She had seen a man pacing alone on the grass beyond the house; pacing and pacing, as though he were trying to keep his body from some wild outburst. His face was a fine one, but she had shrunk before the shadow in his eyes. One of the wardresses told her that he was a "life case"—that was all. Oh, the interminable woe and terror of the words. Sitting back on her heels, she covered her face with her hands. The woman's throat must be like a throat of brass, and Cathy wondered if it was the woman she had seen being dragged along the floor by four wardresses. She had turned her face from the sight as they passed, and felt a sensation of faintness.

A new phase of the night began to develop. Quite close to her—only a few doors away, she judged—someone began to talk excitedly, almost as though she was talking in her sleep. A few broken words at first were all that reached Cathy, and then, with gathering vehemence, a torrent of speech followed, spoken with the wild delirium of sheer madness.

Life had prepared her for no experience such as this. It had come upon her like an earthquake shock on a fair summer day. Her room became like a ward in hell, and she felt along the walls with groping hands. She knew that she must fix her mind upon something tangible, and she sat down upon the edge of the bed, and forced herself to listen.

"I'll stay *everywhere,*" the voice bawled imperatively. "Now what else can I muddle up? I said everything that speaks its mind. There was something else I might have kept secret. If I'd only known." This was how the wretched creature thought then? Broken scraps of words, but spoken in continuous and abrupt jerks. "Didn't he tell everybody that they were not to look back? Of course he did! Now, try to say that. Go on, I say, go on and try. . . . Any woman who ever marries, any woman who *doesn't* marry must acknowledge her mother first. Not her father —I never said her father, never, never. . . . Now then, what did I first remember? Because I've forgotten. I must have been spoken to upside down. If you said *both* my hands you were wrong, they can't *both* be alike. They are never *always* the same." Not for one instant did the stricken creature rest. "I *always* speak the truth," she shouted combatively, "the honest truth. He didn't know that when he married me. But then, I have told you before. I was married *wrong.* I mean, I married the wrong man. Somehow or other I found out that if they want a girl they ask for. . . . What do you think?" there was the least pause—"a clean handkerchief! Go on! Go on! Go on! Yes, yes, yes," the voice towered up to a scream. "Never mind about me. Haven't I yelled it enough? Go on, I say. No, I *won't* shut up. Go on for ever, Charles. How did he know it? Shut up, Thomas, or whatever you like, shut *up,* Thomas. You told me so yourself. Course, you did."

Cathy felt as though the room was swimming, and she sank down on her bed, but still the pitiful tones cried on.

"I knew I'd married the wrong man. That makes just the difference. Oh no, no," again the wild scream, "it was *not* right. I thought it was. I thought it was, that was all. I caught him in the very act, and then when I caught him. . . . I knew him. Now then, do you want the reason first or the cause? The reason or the cause, I say? Do you hear?" The voice tore the night ferociously. "No, you needn't swear. You needn't swear *anything.* If you want to know my age, if you really want to . . . of course I shan't say it. It might be thirty-two, and it might be forty-six." She laughed wildly. "I always say I was born in '76, and *then* I can't count it. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Ten, I must remember that. That's *most* important; and yet . . ." There was a second's pause, and Cathy heard low moaning close to her, without realising that she was herself making the sound, and at once the voice clamoured afresh. "No, do shut up. I'll tell you, straight, it's the most stupid book you ever read in all your life . . . I told you that day I would promise you everything"—to what far away day of sanity did the words refer? Closed now for ever, and wiped out, except for this fleeting glimpse, distorted and awry. "And I did it. I did it because he wanted it so badly. *Frightfully* badly. Am I to say I will be quiet for ever?" She seemed to plead out of a pit of blackness. "For ever, and for everybody's sake?" Wild crying punctuated the flood of words. "For everybody's sake in the house? For everybody's house? *You wait.* Go on, I don't think I've done the last thing yet. Put me there if you dare." The inference was clear, she was going over the old ground, and her imaginary companions were telling her that she was mad. Well, they at least had been kinder than Monica and Jack, they had warned her where she was going. "Will you lay me down *twice?*" the voice shouted in terrified alarm, and then spoke angrily. "Can't you stand on your own legs, stupid? I'll swear it, on my honour to the last—the last—the last. On my honour. Oh, you make me laugh."

The laugh which followed made Cathy crouch down again and hide her head in the pillow, but nothing she could do shut out the sound. The voice was so flexible and so dramatic, and it ranged from high to low, giving the most searching emphasis of all that was said or shouted.

"I'll not tell him such a thing! Did I ever say that anybody hurt? No, I swear I never said anything of the sort. I said. . . . Ah! I *said*. . . . Now isn't there a single woman who can understand me? He said it almost with his dying breath. . . ." She lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper—*"She's got the habit!"*

It was endless, incoherent, and the broken sentences were never finished. Unable to stifle the words, Cathy began to think against the sound, mingled with other maniacal crying, wandering through the night, and her thoughts dwelt upon Monica and Lorrimer. They had betrayed her into this awful captivity, and could they really know, even dimly, what it was like. Her hands were dry and burning, and she felt as though some illness was coming upon her, and that thought, too, added to her distress. To be ill in such a place was like a nightmare of devils. She had once slept in a room in the house of a friend which had affected her hatefully. There was something horrid in it which she had not understood. She felt as though there were spiders and rats and dead men's bones hidden there. . . . God! was she already beginning to think like the woman who never once ceased to shout and cry? Now she would never be able to leave, never again, perhaps; for if they had put her there at all, why should they let her out? Monica loved Jack, and he had raged at his wife—she was his wife! —because he hated her.

Cathy saw him again vividly in the dark, and heard his angry voice accusing her. He had said that she had done some dirty thing. The wheels of her thoughts hastened to racing pace, and she began to talk to herself so that she could follow the direction of her mind, and then, quite suddenly, she exercised a fierce effort of control and held her hands over her mouth. "Let me not be mad, not mad, sweet Heaven," she gasped the words which floated to her from some still place in her fevered brain. They wanted her to be mad, to gape and grimace with the wretched lunatics who had accepted the "Holiday of the Beast." Someone had described war by that strong, expressive term, and war was in itself like madness. There were so many other memories which joined and leagued with the terrors. The memory of a trapped rat—a thing she had tried to forget. She was like that herself, and, as she thought of it with shuddering, her imagination showed her her own face on the lacerated, struggling body. No, she must never think like this; it was to give in and to leave the way easy for them. . . . She knew she must think of something that she had partly forgotten, must make a definite effort of memory.

The pain of thought was unendurable, but she was not angry; she felt sure that she was not angry. Was there any hope or peace in such a condition as hers? If she prayed, would God listen? The woman still continued her never-ending monologue.

It seemed to Cathy that the force of her own terror was modulating slightly, and that the waves of fire beat less furiously upon her heart. Courage, courage, nothing else mattered. She must not let herself be afraid of the mad people, and, far more than that, she must not be afraid of herself. I am Cathy Rossiter, she thought carefully, and I am in no way different to what I ever was. Being here is some awful test put upon me which I have to bear. Jack and Monica have done this to me, but no one can do anything to me really. I am myself and there is really no wall between me and the mercy of God. All this must be endured—and as it has come to me, I shall have to bear it.

The voice was raging again. "I never said her father. If you say I did, you lie. No, there are no leaves at all on the trees. I can see perfectly well. Everything is alike. If they say that there is any difference, they are humbugging you, fooling you. Don't *believe* them—No, no, no——" And then, in the twinkling of an eye, her mood changed, and she began to sing. She had a very beautiful voice, well trained, and with a magnificent range and power, and she began to sing, "Mine eyes have seen the Glory," the great battle hymn of the American Republic, with its swinging, marching rhythm.

Cathy sat transfixed, clasping her shaking body with her arms, and the voice soared up in a kind of ecstasy. The mad woman was evoking new powers, and they came at her bidding, turning the asylum into a clean place, and robbing death in life of its victory. Even passion had been cast aside in this moment; Cathy's own soul was lifted as though light had come to her, and she lay back listening entranced to the voice that had before added so unspeakably to the misery of the conditions.

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat,
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His Judgment seat.
O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him, be jubilant, my feet,
Our God is marching on."

Thus it was that brave men went out to meet the "Holiday of the Beast," and thus it was that even the wretched, duped prisoner in a house of pain might rise to meet the sentence passed upon her.

The voice was very soft now, singing as though to croon a child to sleep, and Cathy could hardly catch the words:

"In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me."

Soft as the gentle touch of dawn, the music flowed from the cell, and whispered in Cathy's listening ears:

"As He died to make men holy, let us die to set men free
While God is marching on."

When she had ceased, complete silence followed. The wild paroxysm, so strangely ended, was spent, and Cathy, who was worn out and at the end of her own physical resources, fell back on her poor pillow, and lay there quietly. Victory had come, the first great victory of the spirit.

CHAPTER XXIV

As the weeks dragged into months, and nothing further was heard of Cathy, Robert Amyas grew more and more uneasy about her. Lady Carstairs had submitted to Monica Henstock's verdict, and was doing nothing further; she had also been alarmed by Lorrimer's bullying outburst, and she had feared to make some indefinite trouble between him and Cathy.

Everything ended in a *cul de sac,* and meantime the weeks were passing and nothing further was known of Lorrimer's wife. Lilian was dissatisfied, but she, too, had admitted the hopeless impossibility of forcing either Jack or Monica to speak. People were leaving London, and the season was wearing to its close, but Amyas gave up any idea of going away. He was too restless and wretched, and he was haunted by the idea that Cathy might suddenly call upon him in some way; ring him up, write or telegraph, and if she did, she must not be disappointed. But Cathy was mute as the dead, and, wherever she was, she did nothing at all to let her friends know. It was during the first week in August, when the weather had become suddenly stifling and sultry, that Amyas decided to go down to Kew Gardens and pretend that he was in the country. He always loved Kew, and there was a wild corner where he could sit on the grass and think. He was under a perpetual obligation to think, these days, and his thoughts never varied.

He walked across the bridge, and was slowly coming to the great gates, when he noticed a figure in the crowd of people all drifting in the same direction; someone whom he vaguely remembered. She bobbed up and down, a few yards in advance of him, and Amyas had a good memory for the way in which people walked. Where *was* it that he had seen that small, insignificant creature, who was so like everyone else? And then, in a flash, he recalled her. It was the ex-governess who had created a scandal. What else did he recall about her? He thought for a moment. Lorrimer had befriended her, and she had been devoted to Cathy; she was living at Kingslade, and it was she who had been in charge of Cathy—Lady Carstairs had it straight from Doctor Henstock—when she broke bounds. His pulses quickened perceptibly, and he hurried on. Here was a living witness of some, at least, of the secret drama, simple or sinister, which had been enacted at Kingslade, and, catching up with Batten, he lifted his hat.

"I am Amyas," he said, "a friend of Miss Rossiter's, and I am sure I recognise you, Miss——?"

"Batten," the girl said, blushing furiously, and looking at him with startled eyes. "I remember Mrs. Lorrimer speaking of you often—very often."

Then there was balm in Gilead. Cathy had not quite forgotten all her old friends.

"I am very glad to have met you like this," he said simply, "and, if you are not busy, won't you come and have tea with me somewhere? I want to talk about her. It's a long time since I saw her, and now she has gone away."

"Oh! I did not know," Miss Batten said, starting violently.

How jumpy the poor girl was, he thought. She had evidently never recovered from her *débâcle*. Amyas walked along beside her. Jumpy or not jumpy, he was not going to let her go. She was Lorrimer's secretary, and she, at least, would have some idea of where they had hidden Cathy. If he had to bully her, buy her, or use force, if persuasion was not sufficient, he would have it out of Miss Batten.

"Are you going back to Kingslade to-night?" he asked.

"Oh no, I am not. I am never going back," she said, in the same nervous way.

Amyas made no reply. He was intensely astonished and also direly disappointed, but he wished Miss Batten not to feel more alarmed than was absolutely necessary. Even if she was no longer at Kingslade she would know a great deal, if she trusted him enough to speak at all frankly.

"Here is a tea place," he said, indicating a house in the old crescent, and opening the gate. "You did say you would come and have tea. I am rather a lonely person."

"I live at Richmond," Miss Batten explained as she obeyed him without any show of enthusiasm, "and I am on my way there. I have to leave a parcel at a shop, that was what took me to Kew."

Amyas led her through a narrow passage into a garden, divided up by screens of wooden trellis covered with creepers. He was determined not to rush Miss Batten. She was just as likely as not to get up and run off unless you anchored her to a cup of tea and a wedge of cake. Once that was done, she would stay where she was, but he felt he must walk delicately and not alarm her. He ordered tea, and while they waited, he lighted a cigarette.

"Then you are working for Colonel Lorrimer in London, now?"

She fiddled with the string of the parcel and appeared distressed.

"I am not, Mr. Amyas. Did you not know that I left Kingslade? I am afraid I left in disgrace." She gave a bird-like glance at him, penitent and shy, and he folded his arms on the small table.

"I heard very little. Miss Batten, I shall speak quite openly to you, because, unless I do, it's no use my talking at all. Tell me anything you can about Miss Rossiter. I am honestly worried and wretched about her."

"I don't know." Miss Batten broke off as the waiter came back with a tray and put it on the table before her. When he had gone, she took up the broken thread. "I feel that I ought not to say anything. Colonel Lorrimer was led and deceived; I know it *could* never have been his fault." Her voice grew incoherent, and she seemed as though she might begin to cry.

"Miss Rossiter had been ill for a long time," Amyas said, capturing the teapot, as Miss Batten made no effort to deal with the crowded tray. "I told you that I was anxious about her. Will you tell me where she is?"

"At Kingslade," Batkins said decidedly. "I left there in a hurry, and I was not allowed to see her. Flora, one of the housemaids, brought me a message, but Doctor Henstock met me in the corridor and would not let me go into Mrs. Lorrimer's room. I was dreadfully unhappy, both at having to leave and because I could not see her." She drank from the thick, white cup, and her hands shook nervously.

"Will you let me ask you why you left?" Amyas said.

"I was in charge of Miss Rossiter," Miss Batten said, relapsing into the more familiar form of Cathy's name. "We sat together talking. Oh, how well I remember it, for it was the last happy day I had. Major Barlow came under the window, and she wanted to talk to him. It was my duty to prevent her, but you know her way; she only laughed at me, and we began to——" she searched for a suitable word—"well—to rag, I suppose; and she pulled me out of the way. It was only fun, and we both enjoyed it—really we did, Mr. Amyas."

"Yes," Amyas said, helping himself to a slab of bread and butter, "I understand."

"I never dreamed of trouble," she was speaking with feverish earnestness. "She was only gone a few minutes, and it did not do her any harm. I am sure that for anyone like Miss Rossiter to be shut up in a room and never let out, is worse than an illness. Of course Doctor Henstock knew what was best, but it was very hard on dear Miss Rossiter."

"Then tell me what happened afterwards," Amyas said thoughtfully. He felt that he was coming upon some fact which was going to corroborate his own instinctive belief that Cathy was the victim of a plot.

"Nurse Binns, the nurse in charge, a hateful woman, came and made herself dreadfully disagreeable, and Miss Rossiter locked her out. I ought to have told you that Colonel Lorrimer and Doctor Henstock had gone up to

London, and were dining there. They came back late, and Nurse Binns was waiting for them."

Amyas gave up the pretence of eating, and lighted a cigarette. "She made trouble, I take it?"

"She did," Miss Batten nodded emphatically. "I was sent for, when Nurse Binns had had her innings, Mr. Amyas, and Doctor Henstock cross-questioned me. She put everything wrong."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that she made out a kind of case. Whatever I said, she turned it round and made it look as though I was lying and hiding the facts." Miss Batten's mild eyes grew angry. "She is absolutely false, and I suppose she thought I did not see her real motive."

"Doctor Henstock is something of a diplomatist?" Amyas said lightly. He was feeling intensely excited, but he betrayed nothing in either voice or look. Miss Batten was growing less and less reserved, and he watched her with interested eyes.

"I hardly dare say it, even to you," Batkins said, lowering her voice to a discreet whisper. "But I guessed, long ago, before Colonel Lorrimer married Miss Rossiter, that Doctor Henstock wanted him for herself. She never liked me, and I was her secretary for some months. During that time I learnt what a cruel, calculating woman she really is. The marriage was a blow to her, Mr. Amyas, and she never forgives."

"Miss Rossiter had no idea of all this?"

"Not a shadow. She believes in everyone, and she thought Doctor Henstock her best friend. I was telling you that they sent for me, and, when I got into the room, Colonel Lorrimer looked fearfully upset and did not speak. In fact, he spoke very little all the time. I am so sorry for him——" She blew her nose violently. "After Doctor Henstock had tried to prove that Mrs. Lorrimer was unfit to be left in my charge—or at least, that I was not fit to take care of her, I was leaving the room and she caught sight of my wrists. I bruise at a touch," she held out her thin arms to him and showed him some faint marks.

"That is from the buckle of my wrist watch, and this, from a knock I gave myself opening a window. You see how little it takes to mark me."

Amyas studied the bruises and nodded silently, as Miss Batten went on.

"I *had* marks, but then, I have them every day of my life; Doctor Henstock showed them to Colonel Lorrimer and I know that he thought something awful had happened."

"But you explained, I suppose? You told him the truth?"

Miss Batten moved uncomfortably in her chair.

"Please tell me the whole of it," he urged, and she fumbled again with the parcel on her knees.

"I have to wander a great deal from the point," she said, "and, also, I may seem to be saying things against Colonel Lorrimer. I wouldn't do that for worlds."

"You need not think I will misunderstand him," Amyas said, with a twist of his mouth; "you have nothing to fear as to that. I know what I think of him."

Miss Batten smiled, and appeared reassured.

"Ever since Doctor Henstock's arrival at Kingslade, she had been—I hardly like to say it—but I do believe that she had been tempting him."

Her choice of expression sounded so quaint to Amyas, that he smiled in spite of himself. The idea of Monica dangling like the forbidden fruit before the eyes of Lorrimer, was humorous to a degree.

"She thought he would have married her, and I may be saying something very wrong, but I know that she began to make him admire her very much." Again Miss Batten paused, and seemed to struggle with her memories.

"All the truth," Amyas said, touching her arm with his hand. "Out with it."

"I never spied on them," she recoiled nervously. "Don't credit me with such baseness; but I used to sit in the big conservatory in the evenings, when it was dinner time, and I left a book there one evening, just before all this happened. It was a very interesting book called 'The Chink in the Armour,' and I felt I could not sleep without knowing how it ended. That was what brought me back there quite late. Usually," she explained, with her eager breathlessness accentuated at every word, "no one came there, and I found the door open and went in. I knew that I had no right to have come—no right to have seen what I did see," she turned her head away.

"And what did you see?" he asked.

"He was holding her in his arms, and her face was lifted to his—oh, the treachery of that woman, Mr. Amyas! How could she treat her friend so, and poor Colonel Lorrimer——"

"Might have had some scruples himself, I should have thought," Amyas interposed drily.

"No, you can't blame him," Miss Batten was on the offensive at once. "She had been following him day in and day out, and all the time she was calling Miss Rossiter 'darling,' and making this fuss about her health."

"Then you knew pretty well what to expect?" Amyas asked.

"I knew that when she showed him my wrists, she was really trying to make him believe that Miss Rossiter wasn't herself, and that she got queer attacks, either that or—I hardly like to speak it—she wanted to see Mr. Barlow so much that she had used force."

"But he could not have believed it," Amyas waved his hand. "Impossible, Miss Batten, unless he *wished* to."

"Nurse Binns had been saying in the servants' hall that Mrs. Lorrimer was as mad as a bee," Batkins said; "I know that, for it was repeated to me. I don't think that Doctor Henstock agreed with her, but by that time I believed nothing she seemed to be doing. She was deep, and kept her ideas to herself."

Amyas thought for a moment. The story was far worse than what he had expected, and he felt an increasing anxiety to know further particulars. Miss Batten was speaking again; her face wan and distressed, and her sandy hair hanging like whiskers on either side of her thin cheeks. She told him that she had gained courage at the last and had spoken to Colonel Lorrimer, begging him to listen to nothing that anyone said but to go to Cathy and get the whole substance of the story direct from her. In the morning she had been given a note; quite a kind letter, enclosing a substantial cheque, in which Colonel Lorrimer informed her that he wished her to leave Kingslade at once. He made no reference to the scene of the previous night, and she was helpless before a clear dismissal. While she was packing, she was brought the message by Flora, who said that "something was up" about Mrs. Lorrimer, and that she had overheard Doctor Henstock telling Colonel Lorrimer that she was 'phoning to some doctor in London.

"There was no talk of Miss Rossiter leaving when I went away," Miss Batten said sadly, ending her recital dismally. "I wrote to her, but she did not answer, and I thought it likely the letter was destroyed. Where is she? please tell me that, Mr. Amyas. I lie awake at night, thinking of her so cut off and friendless. Doctor Henstock had got between her and all her old friends and would not hear of her seeing any of them, and she had made ill-feeling between her and the Colonel. He had changed completely, and he was often in a temper with everyone. Only Major Hammersly and Doctor Henstock could manage him, and they played on his feelings."

"Who is Hammersly?" Amyas said, resting his chin on his hands. "Tell me anything you can of him."

"Well, he is a big man in those parts," Miss Batten said, pushing her cup away. "A J.P. and a landowner. Nothing like so big as Colonel Lorrimer, but of importance. I heard from the housekeeper that he isn't liked over well, but he gained great influence over the Colonel; they were always together, and Miss Rossiter called him 'Beelzebub Junior.' She said he ought to go about with a swarm of flies round his head, and she would hardly speak to him. I think that this made a great deal of trouble as well as all the rest." She sighed, and her tired face looked pinched and anxious.

Amyas said nothing; he was thinking carefully of what he had been told. At last he spoke again.

"None of us know where she is now," he said, and Miss Batten started in alarmed surprise; "not even Lady Carstairs. When you left Kingslade, about a day or two later, Miss Rossiter was taken away to a nursing home, and since then there has been absolute silence."

"But Doctor Henstock knows—and the Colonel."

"Neither of them will say." He leaned forward on his arm and spoke very earnestly. "This does not satisfy me, Miss Batten, and I want to ask you to help me to find her."

"If I can. But how can I? I passed the Colonel in the street one day, and, though he saw me, he walked on and took no notice——" her voice quavered painfully; "and Doctor Henstock hates me. She never liked me, and having me at her house was only one of her traps. She did it to please Colonel Lorrimer. How could I find out? Oh dear, oh dear," she wrung her poor, weak hands desperately, "to think of Miss Rossiter away from everyone. She won't be able to bear it, I know she won't."

"You know the servants at Kingslade," Amyas said, "and some of them may be there still. What sort of man is the chauffeur? He may have some knowledge of where they all went. Could you not go down there—I'll take you myself and wait for you—and see if there is anything to be learnt? I must go, in any case, to see a man called Luke."

"The doctor? Such a dreadful person. But he only came the day Miss Rossiter nearly died." Batkins covered her face with her hands at the memory. "I don't recall that he ever again came into the house."

"Yes he did," Amyas said. "He was called in for a consultation of some blackguardly kind, and he has got to answer for it."

"If I can be of any use, and not appear to be going against the Colonel," she said, agreeing limply. "I can get to-morrow afternoon off."

Amyas looked at his watch. It was still early in the afternoon, and time had suddenly become of huge value.

"We will go now," he said. "There is a garage round the corner, and I can get a car to run us down. You will be back in plenty of time."

He threw tact to the winds, and began to hustle Miss Batten with relentless haste. What she had told him had filled his mind with real alarm. Monica and Lorrimer were leagued for very obvious reasons. Their ugly, unromantic love story was taking a course which threatened Cathy, and months had already gone by. Presently, when he had done what he could to find out where Cathy was, down at Kingslade, he intended to make inquiries about Monica and Lorrimer. For their peace of mind, Cathy had been walled up in impenetrable silence; and where had they thought fit to place her? Cathy, who lived only in liberty. He was almost as jumpy as Miss Batten herself before the car started, and during the journey neither of them spoke.

It took some time to find the battered lodgings where Doctor Luke lived, and Robert sent Miss Batten onwards to Kingslade Park in the car, arranging to meet her in an hour at the gates.

The lodgings Doctor Luke occupied were over a public-house, but the barman knew nothing of his late lodger. All he could tell Amyas was, that, through the influence of Major Hammersly, Luke had got a wholly unexpected job as a ship's doctor, and had packed his bag and disappeared. He left no address, as he never received letters, only bills, which he did not want, and the barman, who was temperamentally inquisitive, thought that Amyas was up to something, if he wanted Doctor Luke at all.

"He wasn't a doctor for class cases," he remarked; "not by any means, sir. We were all surprised when he was sent for to Kingslade Park. Besides, he hadn't even voted for Lorrimer at the elections. He was a seedy chap, Luke, and it all seemed a bit on the queer side."

Robert was aware that the barman would have talked for any length of time, but there was little to be gained by continuing the conversation, and at last he turned away. Luke had gone, it was true, but why had Hammersly interested himself in the scallywag doctor? It had been worth his while to make interest for the scoundrel, so that he should be out of the place, and Amyas thought of the conversation he had overheard, and the evident remorse of the creature. How dark and dirty it was all becoming under the costly and specious exterior. What had they done with

Cathy, this relentless crew? Where was she now, eating her heart out in some unknown place? It maddened him to think of it, and he walked quickly to the gates of Kingslade Park. The car was still waiting, and Miss Batten had not returned. Getting in, he sat down and began to think. Heretofore he had only been unhappy, and now he was honestly alarmed. What had been a motiveless and unaccountable action on the part of Lorrimer, began to take definite shape. If you got hold of a reason why Cathy should be put quietly out of the picture, it made a big difference to the whole case. From Miss Batten he had learnt that Doctor Henstock had the strongest motive known to woman for her part in the play, and, if so, Lorrimer also had a sufficient reason for seeking to be rid of his wife. They wanted to feel safe, for Lorrimer was a "rising man." Hammersly had an axe to grind, and was a person of local importance, and Doctor Luke was only a shady trader in illicit drugs, possibly worse—in any event, a man who had to be got out of the way. All this was as clear as daylight, but it did not yet explain the mystery. So far as Amyas knew, if it was necessary to put Cathy in a nursing home, there was no reason for so much intrigue. She might have been taken there on any pretext, and Monica's advice had been that she should go. Why, then, all this intricate and complex business with Luke?

He could make nothing of it, and sat with his hat over his eyes watching the avenue for the return of Miss Batten.

CHAPTER XXV

She came at last, with her light, hopping walk hurried almost to a run, and Robert opened the door of the car for her.

"I have been a long time," she said apologetically, "but it took ages to find anyone. They are all gone, except the Scotch gardener, and one or two of the stable men."

"Then, the chauffeur isn't there?" Amyas was keenly disappointed.

"We can do nothing by staying here," Miss Batten said, "but I did find out something which I will tell you."

He leaned forward and directed the driver to take them back to London.

"Well?" he asked impatiently, "What did you hear?"

Miss Batten looked at him sideways, and her mouth trembled.

"It isn't first-hand," she said with a touch of caution. "I have been saying this over and over again to myself. To bring such a grave charge against the Colonel——"

"For God's sake say what you have heard. I don't want to seem unfriendly, Miss Batten, but I have been waiting over an hour, and waiting is always demoralising."

"I will tell you just what happened," she said, in no way resenting his slight heat of manner. "The house was closed and there was no one there, so I went into the garden and found McGregor in the grape-house. He is a nice, kind man, Mr. Amyas, very superior indeed. I asked him for news of the family, and he told me that he knew nothing. Major Hammersly goes there every few days to look around, and McGregor said that he appeared to be more master than the Colonel himself. Of Mrs. Lorrimer he knew nothing."

"Don't call her by that name," Robert said suddenly.

"She was Miss Rossiter to both of us first. We can drop that fiction by this time and continue to call her Miss Rossiter."

"I told McGregor," Miss Batten resumed, "that I was anxious to write to her or to hear news of her, and that, as he probably knew, I had been sent away in disgrace." She got out her crumpled pocket-handkerchief and put it to her pale eyes. "I can't say how kindly McGregor spoke. He is one of nature's gentlemen, Mr. Amyas, and he showed it. He asked me to come to the garden house, where his wife lives, and sit down; there had been a great deal of talk, and he never repeated things himself. He said that he never mixed himself up in other folks' business. What was being said had nothing to do with him."

Amyas possessed his soul in patience and listened. Miss Batten wandered in her talk and was unnecessarily prolific as to detail; he submitted to the inevitable. Miss Batten had followed the worthy gardener to his house, and there she had found Mrs. McGregor talking to Mattingly, the head groom, who was still in charge of the stables. As soon as she had spoken of Mrs. Lorrimer, Mattingly became communicative, and repeated a very strange story told him by Jakes.

If there had been some vague scandal in the servants' quarters, relating to Cathy and the amazing George Barlow, it was almost forgotten in the later and far more dramatic events which followed. Jakes had been told to drive to Welldon Grange, which was situated on the outskirts of the village of High Stanford, fifteen miles at least from Kingslade. He was a stranger to those parts, and had to look up the route on the map before they started, and the name of Welldon Grange conveyed nothing at all to him. Mrs. Lorrimer and Doctor Henstock left Kingslade at the hour named by Colonel Lorrimer, and Mrs. Lorrimer appeared unusually gay and happy. She had luggage with her, and so had Doctor Henstock. Following the roads he had marked on the map, Jakes found his way to the gates of the Grange, when, to his surprise, they opened automatically. Mattingly said that the chauffeur told him that he thought it the queerest thing he had ever known. Having arrived at the house, Doctor Henstock got out and was met by a gentleman who appeared to expect them. Mrs. Lorrimer had objected to leaving the car, and he heard Doctor Henstock say that she would only have to wait a few minutes. In the end, she was persuaded to go up the steps, and had disappeared from sight.

Jakes, left alone in the car, had begun to look around him, and he had caught sight of a good looking nurse at a window. He was, so Mattingly told Miss Batten, "always a terror for the ladies," and he had shown his appreciation of the nurse by some means entirely his own. With his usual success in these affairs, the nurse had responded, and a little later she walked out of the house and stood on the far side of the car, where she could not be seen from the windows, and where a harmless flirtation might be carried on undisturbed. When they had philandered for a minute or two, Jakes felt a desire to satisfy his curiosity, and he asked the girl what sort of place it was, and who lived in it. She had told him he was "a proper simpleton."

"Why, it's a lunatic asylum," she said. "Didn't you know that? Everyone in there is mad."

Jakes had stared at her blankly. He had left "Moddom" and Doctor Henstock at a madhouse, and they were staying a long time.

"Was your lady one of the fighting sort, or one of the crying sort? Some are as dumb as the dead, and others will scream for hours," the girl remarked.

Jakes replied, not without warmth, that "Moddom" was not mad, she was the finest lady in the three Kingdoms. He also expressed a wish to leave Miss Henstock as a permanent inmate, as he, with the other servants at Kingslade, hated the sight of the lady doctor.

"You can have her as a gift," he said, "and if you'll take my advice, you'll straight-jacket her right off."

"Yet, for all that, your lady is a loony," the girl retorted, "I heard the Governor—Doctor Chapman—saying she was expected."

The news was so sudden and so ugly to Jakes, that he had only just time to see that Doctor Henstock was returning, and to regain his seat in the car, while the nurse ran off. Mrs. Lorrimer's luggage had been taken out of the car, and Jakes had been given orders to drive Doctor Henstock to the nearest station, which was quite a short run. At the station she had spoken to him, and said that, if he had any idea of the nature of the nursing home in which Mrs. Lorrimer had been left, he was to keep it to himself. "We are all devoted to your mistress," she said, "and I feel sure that you would not injure her in any way. At present you can serve her best by saying nothing at all." She had given him a very moderate tip and he watched her get into the train for London.

For a long time Jakes had kept a still tongue. He was in London with Colonel Lorrimer, and Kingslade knew him no more, until one night, quite late, he returned to collect his belongings. He had had a row with the Colonel and was sacked for impertinence. In his anger he spoke to Mattingly, and said at the same time that a lawsuit should be taken against Colonel Lorrimer and Doctor Henstock. They had, between them, shut "Moddom" up in a madhouse, and the thought of it tormented his mind. He himself was leaving for Canada, and before he left he wanted to feel that someone knew the facts, in case questions ever arose. They had talked it all over, Mattingly, Jakes, and the McGregors, but they did not know what to do. Jakes was off for the Colonies, but the others had good places and a reasonably good master, so that it seemed impossible to go against him. It was no affair of theirs, and they had decided to keep the matter quiet. They regarded Miss Batten as a friend, and were ready to confide in her, but she felt that they would not tell anyone else the alarming facts.

When she had come to the conclusion of her story, she leaned back, faint and trembling in the car, her eyes strained and wild.

"It nearly killed me," she said in a suffocated voice. "Oh, Mr. Amyas, do you suppose that Colonel Lorrimer was a party to such an act as that?"

Amyas was gripping his hands on his stick and staring before him. Cathy in a madhouse. Cathy, who had been surrounded by a wealth of adoration and love such as was the lot of few. If he had heard that she had been sold into indecent slavery he could not have suffered a wilder sense of rage and wrong. Her husband and her trusted friend had used her simple faith in them to lead her unconsciously to the pit which they had digged. She had been months now in this licensed prison, and he sat bereft of speech as the truth flooded over him.

He recalled again the conversation between Luke and Hammersly; Luke had come back that day to try and recall his action, vile enough in all conscience, but clean as compared to the treachery of Monica and Lorrimer. He had been called in, because he was under the thumb of Hammersly; yet, even so, some late glimmering of remorse had caught him, and he desired to undo the foul work to which he had lent his hand. These specious, respectable people who had decided that Cathy was in the way, had played the game well, but not well enough; and what was one to do?

Amyas patted Miss Batten's hands, and spoke at last.

"You have done splendidly," he said. "God knows, if it was not that I had met you, she might be there for ever."

"But you don't think that *he* knows," she said desperately. "He can't know. Doctor Henstock has lied to him, she has told him that it is a nursing home and he only knows that."

"Make no mistake, Miss Batten," Robert spoke savagely, "Colonel Lorrimer hasn't any doubts at all. Without his full consent it would not have been possible. The man is as dishonoured as the woman."

"Oh no, oh no," Batkins sobbed unrestrainedly. "Don't tell me that."

"It matters very little what I say," Amyas said, he was feeling dreadfully tired. "You have found out where she is, and that is everything."

When he got back to his rooms he sat for a long time thinking. He wanted advice, and immediate action was imperative. Now that he knew the truth, he was armed, and he decided that his first step must be to see Lorrimer and give himself the pleasure of telling him what he thought of him.

Taking the telephone book from the table, he looked up his address. Lorrimer still had his flat in St. James's Court, and Amyas decided to go there after he had dined. All through the meal he thought of Cathy. God! How awful it was. He knew nothing of lunatic asylums, but even the best must be tainted by the presence of the inmates. She might not be subjected to harsh treatment—in these civilised days such a thought was impossible—but she was under the closest restraint, at best, and the others with her might be an abiding nightmare. How had they been able to do it all so easily? Amyas had an idea that it was difficult to get lunatics certified. There was so much mystery about it all that he wondered if it were legally possible for Monica and Doctor Luke to pass sentence upon Cathy Rossiter, and no one be able to protect her or interfere. She had evidently been taken to the asylum without the smallest idea of the nature of her destination. If you judged Cathy by the ordinary standards, she was certainly unusual, and some might call her eccentric; but there were no ordinary standards for such as she. How had they dared to lay their sacrilegious hands upon her? His anger deepened and grew as he thought of it. Lorrimer had married her, taken her away from them all, and, when he grew tired of her he had stooped to something suspiciously akin to crime.

He finished eating and told his man to call a taxi. If luck favoured him he might catch Lorrimer at the flat.

When he arrived he was told by Lorrimer's servant that his master was still at dinner, and that he was alone, and Amyas was shown into a smoking-room to wait. The room was comfortably furnished and there was the lingering smell of good cigars. Everything was costly, heavy and ugly, and prosperity was written large upon all. Nowhere was there the smallest trace of Cathy. The photographs on the tables and along the mantelpiece were those of

Lorrimer's own people, and one snapshot of Monica, which showed her smiling and gay. It cost Robert an effort not to take it from its leather case and tear it to atoms. If he hated Lorrimer, he hated Doctor Henstock with double violence. The servant reappeared after a few moments, carrying a tray set with glasses, a decanter of whisky and a syphon. He told Amyas that Colonel Lorrimer was just coming, and as he retired discreetly, Robert heard the advancing footsteps of his host.

Lorrimer was evidently astonished at both the hour of Robert's visit and the fact that he had come at all. He adopted a slightly haughty air ("like an affronted butcher," was Robert's summing up), and he squared his elbows and spoke in a carefully modulated voice.

"How deydo, Amyas?" he said condescendingly; "won't you sit down?"

"No, I won't," Amyas replied, standing with his hands in his coat pockets.

Lorrimer, who was inwardly commenting upon his febrile, foppish appearance, at once looked away.

"Well—if you won't . . ." he said, and he seated himself, lighting a cigar and throwing his case on the table. "Will you smoke?"

"No," Amyas said again, and Lorrimer picked a paper from the floor, speaking over it.

"Then, if you won't sit down or smoke, perhaps you will not mind if I read the paper?" he said rudely.

"On what grounds have you put Miss Rossiter into a lunatic asylum?" Amyas said. He was there to be direct and not to beat about the bush.

"I suppose that you are referring to my wife," Lorrimer laid down the paper and stared at Robert with hostile eyes.

"Unfortunately—most unfortunately, I am."

"What the devil has it got to do with you?"

"I learnt to-day," Amyas said, speaking quietly, "that for months past she has been an inmate of a place called Welldon Grange."

Lorrimer shrugged his shoulders. "I don't ask you how you gained this information," he said bitterly, "but, since you have, it is the case. Now you can get out—go and spread it round London."

Amyas flushed, but he held himself in check.

"You and Doctor Henstock have hidden the fact from Lady Carstairs. She asked you to be frank with her, and you refused. What you have to do now, is to state the grounds upon which Doctor Henstock and a drunken swine called Luke have acted."

Lorrimer's eyes flickered and his face twitched.

"I decline to wash my dirty linen in public," he said slowly.

"As one of Miss Rossiter's oldest friends, I came here to give you a chance," Robert said. He loathed the man as he watched him, but he did not intend to lose his self-control. "If you do not intend to make any explanation, other means will be used."

"I have heard that threat before," Lorrimer said, with the suggestion of a sneer. "You call yourself one of my wife's oldest friends. Perhaps she might not thank you for your interference."

"Let us keep to the point," Amyas said quietly; "I want the facts—if there are any."

Lorrimer looked at him with speculative eyes. After all, since the truth was out, he might permit himself the satisfaction of clearing his own character. Amyas was in love with Cathy in his contemptible way, and there would be a distinct sense of pleasure in letting go. But he intended to do it more or less artistically.

"I think I will tell you," he said, with a short laugh. "Do you suppose that Doctor Henstock or I acted without reason? Come, come now, Amyas, we are reasonable human beings. My wife was, as you know, very seriously ill through her own act chiefly, and she had a long treatment from Doctor Henstock."

"I know all that," Amyas said impatiently.

"It is not exactly pleasant for me, as she is my wife," he leaned heavily upon the word, "to admit that she was carrying on what I must describe as rather a vulgar affair with Barlow," he just glanced at Amyas to see if the shot had told, but gained nothing by his watchfulness. "I only refer to this to let you understand that she was worked up—over excited and behaving rather oddly."

"You need not trouble with excuses," Robert said curtly, "and you can go on to the important part of the story."

"As you will," Lorrimer waved his hand as though disposing of the subject. He was showing Amyas that he had put himself beyond the prejudice of jealous passion. Nothing could be more composed than Lorrimer's whole manner; later on he would let Amyas have it in the neck.

"Passing over that episode," he continued, in the same remote and rather condescending tones, "I must next tell you that my wife attacked Miss Batten, my secretary. She," he winced, and roughed his eyebrows with his fingers, bowing his head, for, even though he enjoyed hitting Amyas, it was hideous to speak of, "she was not sane at the time, I believe, though I did not know it then. What followed was very much more serious. She tried to take her own life with an overdose of a powerful drug, and it became evident that she might repeat the attempt."

There was a moment's silence between the two men, and Lorrimer lifted himself in his chair and looked ferociously at Amyas.

"For her sake I have hidden the fact that I am married to a suicidal lunatic, for her sake I have kept the thing quiet; but you have gone prying into what is no concern of yours, and I'll damned well let you know that this is to be the end of it. She is certified, and is in safe keeping. If you go to Welldon Grange you will find out nothing further, and the doctor will not let you see her. You're a damned sight too much interested in my affairs, and now you can clear out of this."

"Don't lose your head," Amyas said easily. "You are quite a reasonably good liar, Lorrimer, but you fail, because I know that one of your assertions is untrue. I don't believe that Miss Rossiter tried to kill herself, and I don't believe that she is mad. Why, if your conscience is so admirably clean, did you call in Doctor Luke? What was your friend, Doctor Henstock, thinking of, not to have a better prop than that on which to hang your virtuous conclusions? You were all in too great a hurry, and I know, beyond any doubt, that Luke was not convinced, and that he was anxious to blot out his own share in your dirty work."

Lorrimer sprang to his feet in a towering passion of rage.

"Do you dare to accuse me of shutting my wife up in an asylum for some reason of my own? Good God, it's beyond endurance."

Amyas nodded, and walked to the door.

"I came here prepared to hear very much what you have told me," he said. "At present, I shall only tell Lady Carstairs, and those who are closely concerned." He turned at the door and looked at Lorrimer, who bestrode the hearth-rug, debating with himself whether or not he should kick Amyas out. "It's your affair no longer. You've given her months of hell, and you've got to pay for that."

Lorrimer sat down again after Amyas had closed the door. He was stirred to the depths, and his face was heavy with anger. As he saw it, he was innocent, and he had nothing to fear from any amount of cackling people; but he dreaded the voice of public opinion. People—some people at any rate—might accuse him, and you could not silence a scandal once it was alive and active. Why had Monica always made such a point of secrecy? If they had given the facts out from the first it would have saved all suspicion, and suspicion is an ugly thing to tackle if it creeps into the Press. Monica had said that "if Cathy ever recovered" no one must have it to say of her that she had once been mad. It was her wonderful loyalty which had jeopardised the situation—or was it because she had never really felt quite satisfied as to the validity of her own decision? Monica had not given him any clue whatever to this point. The months had brought about a closer unity between them. Without her he would have been intensely alone, and he needed a woman. The wild birds, the women who must otherwise have filled the gap, would have had no real place in his life. He had loved Cathy, but that was over; he was only angry with her now. There was nothing exciting, nothing inspiring about his *liaison* with Monica; it was more like a secret marriage, and there were all the level elements of the holy estate in their intercourse.

To open any question about Cathy was, quite conceivably, to risk the discovery of the relations between himself and Monica, and that must never be. He thought very tenderly of Monica. She was hard and definite to all the rest of the world, but to him she was gentleness itself. If Amyas was out to poke and pry, he might discover things which Lorrimer had no intention of allowing anyone to know. Hammersly more than suspected, but he was a man of the world and could be trusted implicitly; his valet also knew, but he was not likely to talk; Jakes, the chauffeur, who had been very insolent in manner and might possibly have discovered some damning fact, was in Canada.

He bowed his head on his clasped hands, his elbows on the arms of his chair, and looked as though he might be praying. Let them do what they liked about Cathy. She was a certified lunatic, and the law was upon his side. In a way, it was a relief to publish his wrong. Lorrimer was pleased, in a sense, at that, so that the yapping crowd followed the line and, in their heat and excitement, knew nothing of the secret which was precious to his soul. He got up at last and rang up Doctor Henstock. In trouble or in victory alike, he always returned to Monica.

CHAPTER XXVI

Weary as he was, Amyas did not go back to his own rooms. He intended to see Lilian, and to do that he would have to go to her house. Hinton might be there, and there had been all that dreary business between them, but surely that might be left to rest in peace at last. Amyas cast a fleeting thought backwards and recalled his own former self; and he felt as he did so, that there was not very much of the old Robert left. He was glad too, in a way, to be able to feel quite honestly that his love for Cathy had been of later growth. It involved a tiny scruple, because Cathy demanded something righteous, whether in love or friendship. When he realised that she meant everything to him, he had done with Lilian or she had done with him, and he had begun to slip down the descent to Avernus. Cathy had made him realise where he was bound for; not by preaching, but by some far stronger power. She was so wholly good herself, that to love her was to touch the hem of a healing garment. For her sake, Robert had sloughed his former way of life, and his strength had grown slowly with the fight. There was no promise of reward anywhere, but reward had no place in the scheme. Amyas had climbed to a height where love loses sight of self and thinks only of the Beloved. It was easy, now, to toss the conventions aside and walk up the steps of the house where Lilian lived. They both would do anything for Cathy, and Robert knew that Lilian was as straight as a line.

He found her alone, and she was honestly glad to see him, though at once she realised that he had bad news to tell her, and when he sat down she at once asked for Cathy.

"I feel sure you have news of her at last," she said, and her eyes clouded. "Robert, she is not seriously ill?"

He looked back at her and spoke steadily.

As Lilian listened to his story her face grew very white, and she flung out her hands impulsively.

"No, Robert, no. It can't be. Monica and Jack to have done this? But it is impossible."

"It is not impossible; they have done it."

Amyas gave her an account of his recent interview with Lorrimer, and Lilian seemed to be thinking rapidly.

"They have kept everything so quiet," she said, "I don't believe that anyone has the smallest idea. I always knew that Muggins was in love with Jack, but that was a passive condition—or so I judged. We all liked Mug, and I find it so hard to believe that she could be utterly different to what one imagined. Jack Lorrimer was always a puzzle to me, because I never understood what it was Cathy found in him. But he seemed so devoted to her, and one hoped that it might work out quite splendidly."

"Well, it hasn't," Amyas said laconically. "He hates her, judging by the way he spoke. He is totally devoid of either feeling or imagination, and he only knows that he is free of her and that he has been let in. I always knew the man was a rotter, always."

"Yes, you did know it," Lilian admitted. "The next thing to do is to get her out of this awful place at once." Her face grew very serious. "Has it struck you that so long a time under such circumstances may have done Cathy incalculable harm?" She flinched, and went on quickly. "Don't let us think of it, Robert. We must act at once."

"That is why I came," he said simply; "I'm too rabid to think clearly. What ought we to do?"

"I think, in common fairness, I ought to go to Muggins and tell her that we know. If she is playing the game, she *must* help us, by telling us all she can. I'll go to her first thing in the morning."

"And after that. Given that she is not going to help?"

"We'd better have advice. There is sure to be a legal complication. Any sort of patched up business that includes certification may mean that there is a law in existence for dealing with the question."

"Will you come with me to Dobree, when you have seen Doctor Henstock?" he asked, "or do you mind?"

"Mind? Robert, don't be idiotic." She flushed slightly. "We have forgotten all that."

"I can't believe that Doctor Henstock will help," he said, as he got up to leave. "She and Lorrimer are tarred with the same damned brush. Still, since you think it necessary, you must try."

Lilian sat thinking after Amyas had left her. The news of Cathy's fate had come like a thunderclap, and she could hardly believe it. Cathy had always been wayward, and her great zest for life had made her vehement when she ought to have been calm. Cathy cared for everything, she was no half-hearted believer; her friends went surrounded with haloes, and her ideals were gloriously impossible. Now she had come to a place of fear and terror, and not one of all those who loved her was near to be of help. As she stood with her elbows on the mantelpiece, and her face set and firm, Lilian swore that she would not fail her friend.

In the morning she rang up Doctor Henstock, and said that she wanted to see her urgently; Monica listened with a curious look in her eyes. This was the second move in the attack begun the previous night. Lady Carstairs was likely to be the next. They wanted the truth. Let them have it; there was no use postponing the interview. Lilian had a determination which could not be evaded, and it was better to appear ready and even anxious to give the details. Monica looked stronger and happier than she had been, and she had left most of her scruples behind her. There was something very definite to fight for now, for if Cathy were to regain her freedom Monica's whole happiness was likely to tumble to bits. She had steered her difficult course well, and had spared Jack everything. He, in response to her manipulation of the difficult part, had never felt that he need avoid her, and now they had most of what they wanted. Cathy had succeeded in standing between Monica and open admission; had robbed her of Lorrimer's name and the right to live at Kingslade as his wife; but life is a series of compromises, and Monica made the best of it.

He was hers now and he would never desire to change. Let Cathy's people rage like the heathen, they could not assault the secure position in which she stood. She knew how the land lay, and Cathy had been certified. Doctor Chapman's reports had been bad. There was ample reason for close supervision. Cathy was out of her mind, she had tried to escape from Welldon Grange, and that, in itself, was sheer proof of lunacy. At first, Monica had told herself that Cathy would recover and come back; she wished to think this, and it comforted her, but now she felt differently, and she knew that her secret desire was that Cathy should not ever return. It takes time to strangle a conscience, and Monica had stifled hers slowly. She had got past generosity.

When Lilian arrived, she met her with great cordiality, and sat down beside her on the sofa. Her room was far more comfortable than in the old days, and Lilian smelt the faint reek of cigar smoke. Lorrimer and evidently demanded easier chairs, for there were several now, and the flowers in the vases were expensive, not at all the kind which Monica's natural parsimony would have supplied.

"I've come about Cathy," Lilian said, putting her hands on Monica's shoulders. "Why did you do this, Mug?"

"Need you ask me that?" Monica said, meeting her eyes. "It's far worse than you can dream, Lil. Oh, my dear, life is extraordinarily cruel."

She talked quickly and freely. Cathy had shown a whole array of tendencies; she had been unbalanced and hysterical and had tried to take her life.

"I don't believe it," Lilian said, disengaging herself from Monica's hands and getting up. She sat down on a seat a little way off, for the close proximity of Monica was distasteful to her.

"You don't *believe* what I say?" Monica's tone was full of reproach. "Surely, Lilian, you don't mean that you accuse me of putting my greatest friend into a lunatic asylum? What a dreadful thing to say." She paused, between anger and distress.

"No, I don't believe it," Lilian repeated. "Cathy was always wild, but that is quite different. As for the Barlow libel, Barlow himself has denied it. Cathy never went to meet him, in the first place. He found her on the road, and he brought her back to the house. The second time he went to Kingslade, it was to warn her that Colonel Lorrimer was being openly accused of political dishonesty, and, as far as I can gather," Lilian spoke in the same tone, "it is true."

Monica buckled on her armour, and prepared to fight.

"Then you are ready to accept George Barlow's assertion," she shrugged her shoulders, "and you accuse me of lying. I hardly see that I can do anything more."

"Then," continued Lilian, "you said that Cathy had gone for Miss Batten; fought with her like a fish-wife. My dear Monica, tell that to someone else. Miss Batten has queered your pitch hopelessly. She suffers, as you who are yourself a doctor ought to know, from some inherited weakness that makes her bruise or bleed at any trifling touch. Cathy and she were quite happy together, and there was not the remotest suggestion that Cathy lost her head. You have chosen to put your own construction on the whole affair."

"Be careful," Monica said, walking to the writing-table, "I do not allow anyone to bring accusations of this nature against me."

"That's all very well," Lilian said, with a hint of retort in her voice. "You are to say what you choose about Cathy, and, directly I prove to you that you are making a mistake, you stand on your professional dignity. As to Cathy having tried to kill herself, I know nothing of the facts, but I do know that it is the last thing she would do——"

"If she were sane," Monica interposed.

"Why should she take her life? She was, so she believed, going back to London. You admitted that yourself, and she was happy when she left Kingslade with you; the chauffeur told that fact, and he can be got back from Canada to prove it. How do you know that the nurse did not make a mistake as to the amount Cathy could take of the drug? In any case, if she had been living a normal life, it would not have been necessary. You cut her off from us all, and then, without thinking of consulting Lady Carstairs, or telling a single soul, you and Colonel Lorrimer get her buried alive in a madhouse."

"You talk as though it were easy," Monica said. Her heart was beating fast, and she was in a cold rage of anger. "It is necessary to have the opinion of two doctors who have not met or discussed the case together, and, further, a J.P. has to sign the petition. If the Lunacy Laws are ever altered, it will be to make them more easy than they stand at present. And now, Lilian, as you have relieved your mind, and accused me of professional treachery and disloyalty to my greatest friend, perhaps you will go away."

"Have you *no* pity for Cathy?" Lilian got up and looked at Doctor Henstock. "Have you ever been to see her?"

"Doctor Chapman, who thinks very seriously of her case, will not permit her to see anyone whom she has known formerly," Monica said. "No doubt you will say that he is paid to keep her there, and that he is also in the plot." She threw an angry look at her guest. "Your taste for melodrama is carrying you away a little, and, as you came here to abuse me in my own house, I shall be glad if you will leave."

"How could you do it," Lilian said; "how could you have the heart to do it? She loved you better than any of the rest of us did, Muggins. You don't suppose that *she* ever guessed what was plain enough to me. . . ."

"You have said more than enough already." Monica got up quickly, and held out her hand to stop the words she knew to be coming.

"You took her there yourself," Lilian went on in the same accusing voice. "Led her, like that awful Bull in one of Kipling's books, who was trained to bring the others to the abattoir. I was your friend, but now I would rather take the hand of a murderer." She had worked herself up into a passion of reproach. "I suppose I ought to be sorry for you, because it can't be pleasant to know that you are a traitor."

She left the house with its new air of prosperity, its deep chairs, and its scent of stale smoke and flowers, and went on to where Amyas lived in Jermyn Street.

"I saw her," she said, still a little breathless, "and, Robert, I told her what I thought of her. She lied to me, and tried to palm off all the same old story about Cathy and Barlow, her attack upon Batkins, and her attempt to take her life. I am convinced that she and Lorrimer are combined together, peacefully and contentedly, and that it is all in their interests to keep Cathy a prisoner. Surely it is not possible? We ought to lose no time now, and we must get the facts from Dobree."

"Yes, for God's sake let us lose no time," Robert said, and, taking her arm, they went together into the street and got into the waiting car. Was it really odd that he should be driving beside the woman who had once been his wife? It seemed perfectly natural to both of them.

Dobree's office was in the City, and down a narrow street where his rooms were located upon the second floor of a dark, gaunt house. His desk stood huge and imposing in the centre of a fine Turkey carpet, and he sat in a revolving chair attending to a pile of folded papers. When Amyas and Lilian came in, his face registered the full extreme of surprise. He was an old friend, and had acted for Amyas in the divorce proceedings, and now the two who had been so unequally yoked were standing before him, and Lilian had her hand on Robert's arm. He rose at once, and shook hands with them, not attempting to hide his surprise.

"We've come here," Lilian said, "to consult you, Mr. Dobree."

Dobree crossed his legs. "Am I to say that I am sorry, or that I am glad?" he asked in tones of perplexity.

"It has nothing to do with us," Robert said. "What we have to say concerns Miss Rossiter. You remember her; she married a swine called Lorrimer."

"My dear Robert," Dobree spoke pacifically; "you mean Lorrimer, the Member for Kingslade? A very sound fellow. He has changed his views of late, and I approve of him."

"He has shut her up in an asylum," Amyas said abruptly. "How can she be got out?"

"Yes, Mr. Dobree," Lilian spoke earnestly, "she has been there for months; we none of us knew, and she is no more mad than I am."

Dobree put his hands flat on the blotting paper before him, and began to ask questions. How lately had either Robert or Lilian seen Mrs. Lorrimer? Who was the petitioner? What doctors had been called in to certify the patient, and upon what grounds was the petition based?

All these questions having been answered, Dobree looked at Amyas, and shook his head.

"Legally," he said, "there is no sort of hope. You admit that, since Mrs. Lorrimer's marriage, you have not seen her, neither has Mrs. Hinton. The doctor, Doctor Henstock, who felt it necessary to act, was in charge of her for a long time, and the evidence of the second doctor accorded with hers."

"Even if we know that the man is a blackguard?"

"You have to prove that, and, anyhow, he had all the necessary qualifications. There is no proof of any sort that Lorrimer wanted to get rid of his wife, and his friendship with Doctor Henstock was shared by Mrs. Lorrimer. The nurse and Doctor Henstock both say that Mrs. Lorrimer tried to take her life, and, in the eyes of the medical profession, that is regarded as a full proof of temporary insanity."

"But *you* don't believe that she is mad?" Lilian asked.

"My dear Mrs. Hinton," Dobree shook his head, "who am I to say whether she is or not? You have put the case in its best light, because you yourself are not convinced, but no one else will believe you." He swung round a little in his chair. "The fact is, Lorrimer petitioned, because the case was represented to him as urgent. It often is so. I cannot agree that he did this out of malice, because there is not a vestige of evidence to prove it. The doctor in charge of the asylum would have released Mrs. Lorrimer at once, had she not shown further symptoms of insanity. If he is satisfied that she has recovered, the rest is easy, but it will rest upon his decision what you can do for the unhappy lady."

"Then any man can get two doctors to swear that his wife is mad, and there is no appeal after that?" Amyas said. "If that is the law, it's likely that there are more cases than one. I can't believe it, Dobree."

"*Get* two doctors," Dobree repeated. "At this moment I have a client with a mad wife, and in the length and breadth of London he can't get two doctors to certify. She is as sane as a judge once they arrive. In this case, you can't prove a thing. If Lorrimer himself wants to act, it is very doubtful that she would be released. Certainly not, unless the asylum doctor was satisfied."

"And Cathy may stay there for ever?" Lilian's clear voice broke and she put out her hands, groping vaguely.

"Closed in, shut away from us all, and none of us able to comfort her?"

Dobree nodded silently. He was sorry for Lilian's distress, but he had no consolation to administer. He felt that sentiment had outrun her judgment, and he ought to caution them both, before they left.

"To attempt in any way to aid Mrs. Lorrimer to escape would merely mean disaster," he said emphatically. "In these days we are dealing with establishments where the care and protection of the lunatics is assured. Welldon Grange, you said? It is a beautifully situated place, and most costly. Lorrimer has not spared his own pocket. Whatever Mrs. Lorrimer may lack, she has certainly every possible comfort around her, and, after all," he spoke reassuringly, "she may become cured."

Lilian got up quickly. "She was never mad," she said defiantly. "Is it nothing at all that we *know* that Colonel Lorrimer and Doctor Henstock wanted her out of the way?"

"All that has to be proved," Dobree said; "and even if you did prove it up to the hilt, it does not do away with the certification. Doctor Chapman, a man far above all possibility of suspicion, has found it necessary to retain her there. That in itself is an answer. If Lorrimer lived openly with some woman, it would not clear his wife of the sad accusation against her sanity."

Lilian turned to Amyas.

"Robert," she said, "what shall we do?"

"We shall get her out," he replied. "Don't you worry, Lil." He turned to Dobree. "Dobree, old boy, I daresay you are right, but, even if Lorrimer is clean in the courts of law, he isn't in the court of honour, if there is such a place. You haven't helped very much," he smiled at his old friend. "Was there ever a lawyer yet who didn't tell his client to let things be?"

Dobree took Robert's hand. "I don't want you to be in the Police Courts for trespass," he said cheerfully. "It's no good. Leave it alone, and try not to exaggerate."

"The law is merciless," Lilian said. "In the end there will be a huge revolt, Mr. Dobree, and people will make new ones. I suppose you will have a Commission and a Report, and then, after a hundred years, you will get a move on."

"Mrs. Lorrimer can write to her petitioner, or to any Secretary of State," Dobree explained. "The Commissioners visit the place, and she has full liberty to see them alone. Do you really believe that they could be influenced? There, at least, we can get away from the suggestion of collusion."

"I don't feel that it matters much," Amyas said. "The law protects Lorrimer all round, one merely has to ignore it."

"I'm very sorry," Dobree said, standing at the top of the staircase, "but I can do nothing for you, nothing at all."

CHAPTER XXVII

For a time Cathy was kept in bed, and her windows faced the padded rooms, or if not the padded rooms, some place of close detention from whence there came constant sounds of maniacal patients wailing or shrieking; at night there was not any relief, even for a few minutes, from the incessant noise.

If a blessed pause did come, Cathy lay waiting for the next outburst, in tense anticipation, and the effect of her sleeplessness told upon her rapidly. And all through the daylight hours she was the victim of constant interruption from imbecile patients, who came and pressed their faces to the glass of the window, or wandered into her room, to be dragged away, fighting or crying, by their attendants.

What did it all mean? She lay with hidden face and put the question to herself over and over again. Was she there because the surroundings were calculated to drive her mad, and was that why she was kept there? All the sordid misery of the days piled its load upon her, and she felt, at times, as though she must go down under the unbearable weight. Only that she believed that there was hope ahead of her, she would have given up the battle, and loosed the flood gates of her own despair.

She strove to keep her mind from the thought of Lorrimer and Monica, and she stuffed her ears to deaden sound, and compose the red whirl of her mind. The stark reality of horror oppressed her, and the awful dread of any panic in her own soul was like some constant menace. There were hours when she felt as though she were enfolded by the waves of some burning sea, and, weak and helpless, she lay under the scourge of her memories and her terror.

In the most tragic moments of any experience, it is true that the subject who suffers is capable of getting away from the external facts. Cathy, swept by the fire waves, was visited by spells of deep calm, when the reality of her own lot faded away, and became misty and vague. The woman who suffered so cruelly was not Cathy, and she was then able to stand outside herself and pity the poor, broken creature who fought to keep sane. If ever the Cathy on the bed, and the Cathy who was still free, should become merged and mingled in a wild paroxysm, she knew dimly that all would be over for her, and that the gates of doom would never open to let her out. She would then crave for their shelter in the way which she had heard that patients frequently craved for it, and might beg and pray to remain where she was—the last state of the damned. Body and soul seemed to be no longer one, and the fight continued mercilessly. There was some awful temptation in these hours, and it had a hideous humour to it which caught her and forced her to stifle a desire to laugh. To let herself go, go sheer to maniacal joys, the savage desires, the shamelessness of the naked state that spat its challenge to decency. There was some wicked lure in the thought, sly and engaging, something which intrigued the senses. Again and again she flung the foul thing from her, and prayed desperately for strength. Somewhere, amid all the turmoil and the anguish, there was that clean thing which men call courage; something divine in its power.

"It depends largely upon yourself how long you stay."

Were they testing her, trying her strength? She recalled stories of the saints which dealt with inexplicable spiritual temptations they had to bear. Her whole mind was still centred upon the hope promised in the interview with the magistrate, and she clung to it desperately, watching for it, and continually asking why he had not come. She put all her faith in the thought, and, as she struggled, the intensity of the strain grew less. She was gaining control each day, and her faith in herself was now unshadowed, so that the worst dread was a thing of the past. She could not be driven mad. They had done their worst, and now they could not deprive her of her reward. What did it matter if she was aged by years, or if she would never again be the old, light-hearted Cathy Rossiter? She had fought a good fight, and she had conquered. Eight days, Doctor Bracy had said, and she had endured the time without losing her reason.

At the end of eight days the magistrate had not yet come, but her spirits rose, as she realised that her period of probation was ended, and she welcomed her attendant with a gay smile.

"Tell me that I have been good," she said; "I really feel that I have. But to-day it is over."

The attendant was carrying an armful of her clothes, and she put them on the chair beside her bed.

"Yes, yes," she said, "you've been good. Go on being good, and you won't find it so difficult."

"Are Doctor Bracy and the magistrate coming to see me?" Cathy asked.

"Later on they will see you. You're to get up now, and you can go out into the grounds."

Cathy felt as though the gates of hell had opened, and that she was close to her freedom once again.

It surprised her to see that all her clothes had been stamped with the asylum stamp, but it would have taken a great deal more than that to damp her spirits. Cathy had a strong strain of resistance in her nature, and her courage was of a durable quality. At the thought of release, she was able to forget the horrors of the past week. She dressed with the help of the attendant, and was brought through the long corridors, and through Ward II, where a group of witless people stared at her, and one woman ran after her, and begged her to listen to her story. The doors which opened into Ward I were eventually reached, and the effect of the place struck her again. Compared with the dingy surroundings of the infirmary ward, the place she now found herself in was little short of gorgeous. In the passages and vestibules there were comfortable sofas, and tables spread with papers. Two large airy drawing-rooms were at the disposal of the patients, and she heard the click of billiard balls coming from behind another door. She was shown into a cheerful bedroom, entirely different to her former cell. The dining-hall was, so she learnt, in another part of the house. Agnes began to arrange her clothes in the wardrobe.

"Don't do that," Cathy said gaily; "it's waste of time, Agnes. I leave here to-day, as soon as I have seen the magistrate."

The attendant shook her head. "I don't like to disappoint you," she said sympathetically, "but, if I were you, I would not count on it. They may want you a bit longer."

Cathy's spirits fell. She sat down on the edge of her bed, and her heart beat painfully. It was discouraging, but she refused to believe it. Surely they must know that she was not mad. She had endured the sickening horror of the infirmary ward without complaint, she had obeyed orders and had given no trouble. All this must tell in her favour, and she cast off her momentary distress.

"I am sure it is all right," she said. "Let me have my hat. It's so long since I was out in the fresh air."

Agnes gave her a wide garden hat, and looked at her with unveiled admiration as she put it on. Outside the door the servants sang or whistled at their task, and a bell was rung somewhere in the building.

"That is for the walk," Agnes explained. "I'm 'on you,' as we call it, and it's time to go out."

"I don't think I shall go," Cathy said, hesitating at the door. "Will the others all be there? I don't want to walk with them, please, Agnes."

"Time for your walk, ladies," a voice was speaking authoritatively along the passage, and Cathy heard a scuffle of feet and the confused murmur of voices, some loud and some low, but all confused and jumbled into an ugly, incoherent sound.

"No, I'm not going," she said, and she took off her hat. "I'll wait here. Will you go and tell Doctor Bracy that I am ready to see him?"

Agnes picked up the hat again and held it out to Cathy.

"Now, don't give trouble. You only got out of the infirmary a few minutes ago. Do you want to be sent to

Ward II? The place you came through? I thought not," as Cathy shrank away and shuddered.

"But, you see, I'm not a patient any longer," she said persuasively. "It isn't as if I had anything to say to the rules."

"Until I am told that you are free I must do my duty."

Cathy submitted to the inevitable. The idea of a walk in the company of a whole band of lunatics was alarming enough, but at any rate it could not be as bad as the awful, sordid indecency of her past experience. She was to be ordered about and directed until the last moment, and fear of jeopardising her chances of escape made her obey.

She walked through the hall, the attendant behind her, and was hurried onwards to join the procession of people now winding its way along a wide path through the grounds. For a moment she stood and looked back at it. Outwardly, it was picturesque; an old, red-brick house, very large and covered with creepers. At the back there was another wing, and that part of the house looked desolate and ill cared for. Cathy concluded that it was there the cheap wards were situated, where poor lunatics, whose people were unable to afford the luxury of the house itself, were hidden away. What sort of state was theirs, she wondered pitifully? It was like some dreadful, secret place for penitents, where the hours of the day were divided as though in the house of a perverted religious order. They were physically isolated from the world, and the waving trees and the wide glorious sky overhead accentuated the contrast.

The poor waifs of circumstance drifted on in their walk, and Cathy lingered behind, watching them. Just in front of her, there was a woman with white hair, who looked as though her life might have been a good, useful one, but some break in the tissues of her brain had doomed her to the eventless idleness of the asylum. Some event, too strong in its demands, must have overtaken and crushed so many of the patients. Some were grotesquely clothed. One woman, who hurried on as though she was pursued by a whip lash, wore an expensive dress, flung on in absolute disorder, her silk stockings were in holes, and her shoes trodden down at the heel. Her hat, decorated with a huge feather, was pinned on the back of her head, and as she walked she gave vent to sighs and groans or rude laughter, and seemed to be unaware that she was not alone. Many were quiet and orderly, and these, she supposed, had spent years there. They knew all the rules as well as the wardresses, and they knew exactly how to behave, until some crisis caught them, when they suffered the penalty of degradation to the infirmary or the padded cell. Surely, in all God's world, there was no sadder place than this? People who were unmanageable anywhere else were made to learn to be manageable here. The high walls closed them in, and, if there was no special unkindness, there was the indifference of paid service, wholly devoid of love. The wretched conclave, of which she was one, was chiefly composed of the weak of intellect and the strong of passion; waste flotsam of the world of twilight minds. She had been told again and again by her attendants that the Grange was a happy place for lunatics. Lunatics were not like other folk. But, in Cathy's eyes, it was the most heart-breaking sight she had ever witnessed. These people were caricatures, ghosts of themselves, and the disaster of sane men and women of sensitive mind finding themselves so placed was hideous to consider. She was leaving those aisles of torment that day, and she had pity and to spare for the rest.

Again she watched the strange line of which she made the last. Here and there she was struck by the sight of the survival of lost dignity, the touch of some wan grace which had once made its owner distinctive and charming; the indescribable signs of birth and breeding, unconquered yet by the passing days. But it was not only the external sight of her companions which touched Cathy to the depth of her soul. The faces she saw were strange, and, with only a few exceptions, bondage had marked them with its image and superscription. From all manner of varied beginnings, and with differing conditions and differing life stories behind them, they were caught and grouped together at last. They were out for exercise, not for anything else, and Cathy walked on beside a woman who shuffled as though hopelessly weary already. Units of the army of the mad. She became hypnotised by the sight of the crowd ahead of her. They were coerced into exercise, and they showed it by their walk, as they rushed in urgent bursts of activity, or slouched and dragged, like unwilling children on the way to school. They progressed in no kind of order, and each one bore a burden, to the sound of steady footsteps. The incorrigible lunatic was not among them, and the quiet ones were terribly pacific; there were others also, shy and furtive, who snatched at one another and giggled inanely. Cathy lifted her eyes to the sky; she still had hope, and the comrades in her misfortune had only despair. As she walked along, she was spoken to suddenly by a slight young woman with clear grey eyes.

"You are a newcomer," she said, and her voice was sympathetic. "I am afraid it is all very hard for you to bear."

"I expect to leave to-day," Cathy said, smiling at her. "My being here at all is a mistake."

"Then, let me warn you that it is a very dangerous mistake," the woman with the grey eyes spoke again. "I am also a victim of the same kind. Be very careful what you say to Doctor Bracy."

She talked on, explaining to Cathy that her best chance lay in being quiet. She herself had come there to go through a rest cure after a bad nervous breakdown, and had been assured that she would be practically at liberty. The facts were far otherwise. Her uncle had petitioned for her certification, and, after a time in the infirmary ward, she had been informed that she was mad. She told Cathy that her name was Veronica Trench. "Once the stigma of lunacy is branded upon any living soul, you will find, as I have found, that no one will listen to you," she said.

"But the magistrate whom I am to see?" Cathy asked faintly. She felt unnerved and shaken.

"They are all the same; you and I are outcasts."

"I am to see Doctor Bracy when I get in," Cathy said anxiously.

"The visits of the doctors are only a farce," Miss Trench said, with evident reluctance. "It is no use for me to give you false hopes. They make no effort to speak privately to any patient, and I shall be surprised if you get two minutes with him. You will want all your courage," she added, and Cathy gripped her hand silently.

The walk terminated at last, and they were gathered again in the vestibule, as it was time for lunch. Everywhere there were the voices of attendants calling to their patients or to one another, and again they were herded into line. A woman with a flushed face and liquid eyes caught Cathy round the waist and addressed her as "Darling." "Why can't I be happy?" she moaned, and began to roll her head wildly, until her attendant pounced upon her and restored her to order. Once again doors were locked and unlocked, and the procession passed through Ward II, the patients driven along by the warders and wardresses, for there were now a number of men added to the crowd. At the end of one of the passages there was a huge mirror which reflected the throng, and Cathy caught sight of her own picture in its length. Was it really she? Was *this* Cathy Rossiter? She averted her look at once and hurried on with bent head.

The dining-hall was a large, lofty room, hung with good pictures, and in the centre a long table was laid. Some of the patients rushed to their places, and began to seize the slices of bread already lying there. The woman in the gorgeous clothes, whose hands were dirty and covered with rings, ate ravenously and talked with her mouth stuffed to overflowing.

Swept by a fit of revulsion too strong to conquer, Cathy pushed back her chair. "Let me go, let me go," she said desperately, and Agnes came to her side and replaced her at once.

"No noise there," a voice of command spoke sternly, and Cathy felt that the people around the table all cowered at the sound.

"It is impossible for me to stay here," she repeated. "Where is Doctor Bracy? I must see him at once."

"I'll have to report you if you go on like this," Agnes said, tightening her grasp. "Sit down and keep quiet."

Cathy looked about her uncertainly, and then she caught the eye of Veronica Trench. Everyone was looking at her, and the woman with the large hat seemed as though she might break out into some show of violence, for she hammered the table with her clenched fists.

They had subdued her, and she sat down again, but she could eat nothing, and though Agnes spoke to her sharply, she made no reply. Once again the memory of Lorrimer and Monica was awake within her. They had brought her to this, and they had placed her here. Still she held on to her only hope, the visit from the magistrate. She would surely be away from it all in a few hours now, and there was nothing which could be accounted mad in desiring to leave such company.

After lunch, the inmates of the Grange who were on parole went off into the village, and the others, who were accounted sane enough to enjoy a moderate freedom, sat on the lawn. Cathy found her friend, and took courage as she placed herself beside her. Doctor Bracy had not come, and the time was dragging on.

"It will make me very late," Cathy said, "not that anything matters once I get out."

"Build upon *nothing,*" Miss Trench said emphatically; "only, above all things, keep from any outburst. I have asked them to let me sit beside you at meals; that will be better for us both."

In the end, Doctor Bracy did come, and he strolled up to where Cathy was sitting.

"Well, and how are we?" he asked genially. "I am going to suggest that you should do some gardening, Mrs. Lorrimer."

Cathy tried to smile up at him. "But I am going away, once I have seen the magistrate," she said. "You promised me that, Doctor Bracy."

"I promised you? Oh, no, I think not. You are out of the infirmary, you have a nice room, and you will be very comfortable here."

She looked around her, and back at his red, good-tempered face.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You're likely to be here for a little longer," he said. "Now, I must be off. How are you, Miss Trench? Getting over it, eh?"

"I am waiting," Veronica Trench said quietly.

"But you don't mean that you consider me *mad?*" Cathy asked. She had got up from her chair, and she caught his arm, for he seemed as though he had no intention of remaining there.

"I warn you," he said, "that your chance of leaving here depends largely upon yourself. Don't excite yourself, Mrs. Lorrimer, it does no good."

"Then you say that I am insane?" The colour had flown from her face and she was deathly white.

"You have been certified, it's a fact," he said briefly, and Cathy made no further attempt to stay him now.

For a day or two Cathy worked frantically in the garden, hoping to exhaust herself sufficiently to induce sleep, but her thoughts gave her no rest, and her eyes looked haunted. She had still one hope left in the Pandora's box, and she could not let herself doubt its certainty. The weather kept gloriously fine, so that she was able to be out of doors all day, and Dr. Bracy, who now and then hovered near her, told her not to think of herself, but to take an interest in games, or in the work upon which she was employed. Other patients condoled with her, telling her that anyone who was sent out to garden, was invariably kept there for a long period; it was regarded by them all as a bad sign, but Cathy tried to close her ears.

She had been weeding in a violet bed one afternoon, and cutting the long straggly runners with considerable skill and knowledge, under close observation all the time, when Agnes was called by one of the house servants, and to her surprise Cathy was informed that there was a visitor to see her. She lifted her flushed face and stared incredulously, and for one moment she thought that it was perhaps Aunt Amy. Aunt Amy might come to her, even if she believed her mad; and that thought was followed rapidly by another. "What if it were Monica." If it were, she would plead with her, and pray her to use all her power to get her release. She threw aside her leather gloves and went towards the house, and as she crossed the hall where many of the patients were sitting in the deep, comfortable chairs, talking together, she noticed that they whispered and looked at her with queer inquisitive glances, as though they too were interested.

When she was shown into a small, dark room down a passage, and rather away from the reception rooms of the house, her heart was beating violently, and to her surprise she saw a stranger sitting at a table. He was an elderly man with a beard and loose, grey clothes, and he looked at her rather awkwardly as he rose to his feet, and Cathy stood silently watching him.

"I am Pratt," he said, and he avoided her eyes. "Charles Pratt, Justice of the Peace. You sent me a communication——"

Cathy clasped her hands together, and a wave of joy swept her, and she advanced impetuously.

"You are the magistrate, and you have come at last." She made an impulsive movement with her hands, and then realised with a touch of dismay that he was falling back a step. With all his look of bad-tempered dignity, he was anything but comfortable in her presence.

"Yes, yes," he said, and he seemed to be trying to speak soothingly. "What is your complaint? What have you to say?"

Cathy sat down and gripped the arms of her chair with tense hands. She must be careful—careful.

"I'm here through a dreadful mistake," she said.

Mr. Pratt seated himself, and rubbed his spectacles with a silk handkerchief; he seemed to take her statement for granted, but he spoke quite kindly.

"My dear lady, I want the details," he glanced at her again.

"I have been accused of trying to take my life," she said earnestly, leaning forward and looking at him with her wide clear eyes. "Yes, of suicide."

She read horror in his glance, and translated it into sympathy.

"Dreadful," he said emphatically. "Perfectly dreadful. Do you not know that such an act, besides being a sin, is also a felony? You might have to appear in the Police Courts." He looked intensely affronted. "You probably are not aware of this?"

Cathy frowned a little, and began again.

"I never *did* try to take my life," she said gathering her courage once more. "I want to make you understand that the doctor who certified me was mistaken. . . ."

"Doctors," corrected Mr. Pratt. "There must be two."

Cathy drew a deep breath. What was her case worth, now she had come to state it? Yet this man held her whole future between his hands, and compared to the irritable frigidity of Mr. Pratt, Dr. Bracy appeared almost an ally. She could see that Mr. Pratt was angry because he had been sent for, and she began to tell herself that she must try some other method with him.

"A man like you," she began again, "will easily understand that some circumstances are impossible to explain. I could not speak of myself to the people here, but there was trouble," she paused, and looked down, it was so hard to speak of this, but perhaps there was some hope that the grey man who looked at her sideways and looked away again, might be pitiful.

"Trouble, of what nature?"

"My husband and I had a difference of opinion, and the woman who certified me—my greatest friend, I believed—wanted me out of the way. I *did* take an overdose of a sleeping draught, but that I can explain—I thought it harmless. The following day I was perfectly well, and without the smallest idea of what was arranged, I was taken from home, and brought here." Her voice faltered. "I can hardly give you any idea of what I felt."

"Very sad indeed," Mr. Pratt remarked. "Dreadfully sad. But on the other hand, imagine what it would be for a lady like you to appear in a police court." He was obviously horrified at the thought and he repeated it again, while Cathy felt her hope die down, and then recover once more.

"Could I be tried for it?" she asked, her whole face lighting at once. "If so, why has this not been done? Even if I were convicted, I should not care. . . ."

Mr. Pratt raised a protesting hand. "I can only give you five minutes more," he said, laying his watch on the table, "and I must ask you to reconsider your words. You would have been sent to prison instead of to this really delightful place, and think of the disgrace. Besides, you have no idea of what it would be like."

"I never tried to take my life," she said helplessly, "and I was trapped."

Mr. Pratt shook his head. "I know nothing of that," he said firmly, "but I regard suicide as a very grave and terrible act, and though I am extremely sorry for you, I can only say that I have not received a shred of real evidence to prove that you are innocent of this attempt. Please do not misunderstand me, Mrs——" he glanced at the paper, "Mrs. Lorrimer, I know that I have your word, but I also have the word of the doctors who thought otherwise."

He got up and took a soft hat from the table, replacing his watch in his pocket, and Cathy ran between him and the door. "You can't mean that you will do nothing?" she said, holding her arms out to bar his passage, and then she saw his face change. He was afraid of her once more, and he walked quickly to the bell and rang it violently. Agnes came in response to the summons, and Mr. Pratt wished Cathy good evening, and with a renewal of his former dignity, left the room, as she stood watching him with reproachful eyes.

Agnes touched her arm, but Cathy did not stir, an overpowering sense of faintness seized her, and before the attendant could catch her in her arms, she fell heavily on to the floor. Her last hope had vanished with the grey, self-satisfied man, who looked always a little angry with everyone he met.

CHAPTER XXVIII

As the months passed slowly by, Cathy lost all hope. No answer had come to any of the letters she wrote to Monica or Lorrimer, and she felt that she had nowhere to turn. The magistrate, Mr. Pratt, had done nothing, and an appeal she made to the Commissioners had been left to gather the dust in some pigeon hole in an official desk. As Monica and Lorrimer appeared to her to be the only people who could help her, she refrained from writing to her aunt or any of her old friends. A new sense of dread had come over her, and because she knew that she expressed herself wildly, she feared that, were she to write to them, they might attribute all she said to delusions. Monica and Jack knew otherwise, and if they had any pity, they might accord her the peace of oblivion which she had demanded of them. The papers had informed her that Lorrimer was now a Baronet and had received signal honours, and from that time onwards Doctor Bracy addressed her as "Lady Lorrimer," and seemed to be impressed by her title.

From Cathy's standpoint, the crowning touch had been placed upon the huge erection of shams and false protests, for it bade her recall the times when Lorrimer had talked with heat upon all these subjects, and had sworn to her that his own pride would forbid him to accept any such tinsel crown. In an interview described by an enthusiastic journalist in an evening paper, Cathy read that her husband, the erstwhile pioneer of simplicity and plain ways, had described himself as "overcome by the proof of confidence and appreciation of his services" which was so signally bestowed upon him; and she wondered if there was anything real about him anywhere?

Veronica Trench had seen Cathy through the tempest of recollection which followed upon the news, and did her best to quiet and console her. She also begged her to make no objection to using Lorrimer's name, and to drop the determined attitude she had taken up when she refused to answer unless spoken to as "Miss Rossiter." "Can't you understand," she said earnestly, "that in an asylum, everything is attributed to the same cause?"

Winter had worn through, and spring had come back to the world when Veronica Trench left Welldon Grange, and Cathy was abandoned to a more complete loneliness than before. She realised that there was no actual unkindness in the hearts of the men and women who were the officials of the place, and she had no complaint to make of ill treatment. It was the system which they obeyed that lay over the inmates like a blight. There was no hope, no help, nothing to look forward to, and lying awake at night, Cathy began to think of the possibility of escape. In her haphazard way, she gave no special attention to detail. If luck favoured her she could trust to it once she got out into the road; the road that ran free beyond the asylum gates. Always she thought of the road, and it promised her the way of escape, if she could only get there. Cathy was incapable of detail at the best of times, and her months of incarceration during which she was living entirely under rule, had deprived her of the quickness of wit which such a venture demanded. Her attendant, Agnes, was a kindly girl, but Cathy did not dare to give her the smallest hint of her design. It would not, she felt, be fair to involve anyone else, and she had always believed in facing life without dragging others into the mêlée. For this reason also, she had declined to be put on "parole," as she could not break her pledged word; but the thought of escape lured her eternally, and she thought of little else.

Agnes was a voracious reader of novels, and Cathy decided to make the attempt one day when her attendant was completely absorbed in her book. They usually sat in a distant part of the grounds, because Cathy felt better when she was well out of the way of her fellow patients.

As they walked to the seat in a bower of spring lilac not far from the gates, Cathy had leaped suddenly to the urgent moment of action. Agnes carried a work-basket, and in it there was a small pair of scissors which Cathy fingered carelessly as she pretended to sew. Her white underskirt was narrow, and she must manage to cut off the frill so that her movements should be unhampered and free.

"Aggy, what are they doing now?" she asked slipping the scissors into her pocket. "I love the way you take them all so seriously, these people in books. Do you see that lemon azalea? It is flowering weeks too soon, and I'm going to look at it." She got up, a queer tremor in her nerves, and wandered away slowly, her white dress shining in the sunlight, and her graceful walk calling up a look of admiration in the lifted eyes of Agnes the wardress. She should have followed Lady Lorrimer, but the lure of the book was strong and she sat reading steadily.

After a few minutes she looked up again, and though she could see the lemon azalea, there was no sign of her charge, and she felt annoyed, though by no means alarmed. In her secret heart Agnes hardly credited the fact that Lady Lorrimer was mad, but she knew very well that madness comes and goes in many cases, and that her patient might not be as sane as she appeared. Still, she was not troubled. She believed that Cathy had wandered on, like a white butterfly, and that she would return. She had only half a dozen pages to read to finish the book, so she read on and closed it with a sigh of envy. Books nearly always finished happily, and life, as displayed before her eyes, was not a happy place.

After searching the paths and coppice, and in the shrubbery, Agnes grew thoroughly alarmed, and when she called up some of the warders, they added to her fears. A suicidal lunatic is hopelessly untrustworthy, and there might be grave danger to Lady Lorrimer, in being so long alone. High or low there was no trace of her in the immediate neighbourhood, and Agnes discovered, with a cry of alarm, that her scissors were missing. She was frightened, and the whole state of affairs grew ominous. Search of a more thorough kind became necessary, and the alarm was given, and by sundown Cathy was discovered hiding close to the gates. She had crouched down in the heart of a deep privet, her hair was loose and her hat gone. As the searchers followed her, she had run distractedly from place to place, wherever the bushes gave cover, and she had cut her petticoat into strips and her lace dress was ragged and torn.

The dreadful excitement of the chase had been too much for her, and when they came upon her she fought violently against her captors. Weeping hopelessly, she stood at bay while they sought to persuade and pacify her. She saw herself surrounded, and their very desire to reassure her increased her sense of despair, until her control broke; and when Agnes tried to take her gently by the wrists, Cathy struck out blindly. Then it was that the rush came, and she was overpowered and beaten to her knees. They had done their best not to hurt her, but she realised that they all now regarded her as dangerously mad; the sorrowful look in the eyes of Agnes alone would have told her that. She lay sobbing, face downwards on the grass, until they carried her away.

The long piece of cambric torn from her petticoat was lying on the ground, and Agnes took the scissors from her silently. Cathy's liberty, such as it had been, was ended, and her fate looked black enough to cause her attendant nurse real sorrow for her.

It was a hopeless, wretched affair from beginning to end, and the odds were entirely against Cathy Rossiter.

From the comparative peace and the real comfort of her late surroundings, Cathy found herself led moaning feebly through the dreary wilderness of Ward III, situated on the farthest side of the asylum; a place she had never seen before. It was here that the incorrigible lunatics were kept away, and the decree was that Cathy now belonged to this company since, once again, she had attempted to take her life. The cambric was strong enough of texture for her to have strangled herself, and the theft of the scissors added to the case against her.

As she looked dully around her, she realised that the sights and sounds were not as terrible to her as her first experience; she had grown used to horror, but she could not believe nor understand when she found that her destination was the padded cell. This was the dark shadow which haunted the bravest mind, and Veronica had warned her never to do anything which was likely to make her way lie there. She had done it now, and leaning on the arm of the wardress, devoid of strength and bereft of courage, she could do nothing but cry helplessly and plead in vain.

The cell was small, seven feet long by four feet wide, and over her head there was one tiny window, too high to reach with her hands. A memory of something remembered long ago came back to her, and she recalled how she had sat in the waiting-room with the gay chintz curtains, and thought of the prisoner in "Justice" who had held up his hands to the light. At last she, too, had come to this, the lowest pit of the inferno, where faith and hope were slain. She ceased to cry, and a dull stupor overtook her. If she sent for Doctor Bracy he would be sorry for her, but explain that it was her own fault. In the same way Doctor Chapman would not be unkind, but he would believe that his inexorable "system" was the one and only way for the insane.

At last the door opened, making a clear square of light in the blackness, and two wardresses came in, both strangers to her. They took no notice of her when she cried for Agnes, and asked that she should be sent to her, but stripping her quickly, with the competence of long habit, they continued a conversation about their own affairs. One of them, she gathered, as they turned and held her hands out of the way, was shortly to be married, and was exuberantly happy at the prospect.

They treated her like a child in disgrace, and clad her finally in a coarse chemise, which the elder wardress of the two told her she could not tear or fashion into a rope; therefore, as there was nothing about for her to do herself a mischief, she would be safe enough.

They laid her bedding on the floor. A mattress covered with ticking and a coarse ticking sheet, and the door was shut behind them. The happy wardress and the sour one were both indifferent to her state, and Cathy gripped her arms until she felt the blood come through. It was as though, quite suddenly, a fearful and strange idea was present to her mind. What if it was true? What if this that all the rest believed of her were really the case, and she *was* mad? The fancy jeered at her and defied her, and she clasped her hands on her aching head. Doctor Chapman, Doctor Bracy, the wardresses and the silent world which left her to her fate, agreed about it. She alone refused to believe it, but she was losing her courage, and the thought that she had drifted to the waste places where the wanderers roamed in their misery, became oppressive and awful. She *was* mad then? Even though she knew that she had never tried to take her life? Yet if she could now find the means to end it all, she knew that she might use them.

At evening Cathy was called out of her cell, like an animal out of its cage, to eat her food at a table opposite her door, but the change brought no relief. Around her there was confusion and strife, and the inmates of Ward III gave the wardresses as much as they could do to keep them in check. The devils danced here with utter shamelessness, and Cathy closed her eyes and pushed away her plate. She looked like a woman out of the Middle Ages, who had been accused of sorcery, sitting in her wretched garment, with her long hair in two great plaits, her eyes pitiful and haggard in her beautiful, care-worn face. From the end of the passage a woman had been watching her, mouthing and grinning, and suddenly, with the swiftness of an arrow, she flung herself upon Cathy and emptied over her shoulders a jug of water that stood near her, and then fell to thrashing her with a towel.

Under the attack, Cathy did not stir, she lay forward over the small table and submitted mutely, until the wardresses pulled the woman off and stifled her shout of triumph. The last thing had indeed happened now, and Cathy broke into prayer. Mad people often prayed, and she knew that she was repeating phrases she had heard the others use. What did it matter? Nothing mattered any more, for she had admitted to herself that she was mad. Let them do what they liked to her since the hour of doom had struck so irrevocably.

And so the days and nights dragged by, and Cathy fought no more. Where had she gone? She often wondered dimly and repeated the words she had loved:

"John York, John York, where have you gone, John York?
King of my heart, King of my heart, I am out on the trail of thy bugles."

and when she had said it a dozen times it made her laugh in her black cell of horror, laugh until she felt quite weak from the effort. Doctor Chapman came and lectured her, in his kind and God-fearing way, upon the crime of suicide, and she told him, in a fit of revolt, that she had done it all intentionally.

"You want me to admit I am mad? I admit it. I'm as mad as Ophelia, or Hamlet; as mad as anyone who has ever thought things out and told the truth, as mad as a March hare, Doctor Chapman."

He had said, "Hush, hush, dear lady," over and over again and gone away sorrowful.

The circle of her thoughts had changed; she did not care any longer; nor did it seem to matter when they released her again, and she was passed through the various stages, back to Agnes and her old room, and by then summer had come and the days were gloriously fine and bright once more. She was so gentle and quiet that Doctor Bracy missed her former fire, and rallied her often.

"Don't be so peaceable, Lady Lorrimer," he said. "Let's have a good argument. It always clears the air." But Cathy would not be induced to argue.

"You all say I am mad," she said, "and now I suppose I am. I don't much care."

When the Commissioners went their rounds she hardly spoke to them. They would not believe her, and it was useless waste of energy. She would never get out, and youth, withering so quickly, would turn to dull age, and age wear itself out to death, while the days went on in their awful monotony. Only in the little chapel in the grounds did

Cathy ever regain some touch of the winged sense of being lifted up above the cruelty of life, and there, on her knees, she tried to conquer her passionate resentment against Lorrimer and Monica. If she could put that away, she knew that she would have achieved a great moral victory. Her body was caught in the trap, but that was the least part of her martyrdom if she could truly say, "My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler."

She believed that her friends counted her as dead to them; they had probably accepted the story—everyone accepts such stories without question, and she did not blame them. In truth she was dead, and there was no great and glorious resurrection for her. She had changed in the sense of impaired beauty; there was deep sadness in her blue eyes, which had formerly laughed at life, and a certain steadfast tensity about her mouth. She seemed to seek perpetually for something beyond what she was looking at, and people pointed her out and whispered together about her.

Agnes, now her devoted attendant, believed her to be a saint, and frequently said so. The soul within was shining very clearly as Cathy trod the upward way, paved with pain and heavy with grief, but when Doctor Chapman spoke to her of her mental state, and said that he was growing hopeful, she received his encouragement listlessly and only shook her head.

"It hardly matters now," she said, and her voice was forlorn and weary. "I would like to be free, but it is too late."

"Oh, no, Lady Lorrimer, don't get that idea into your head," he said encouragingly. "There is such a thing as morbidity; I don't wish to have to report of you that you are in the least morbid."

Cathy smiled suddenly and looked at him.

"You have different names for everything here," she said. "If one attempts to escape, one is incorrigibly insane; if one defends oneself, it is another proof of lunacy; and if one becomes patient, it means that you are morbid."

"Keep cheerful," he said, and he looked at her sympathetically, for he was really sorry for Lady Lorrimer, and he had gone so far as to hint that it would be perfectly safe for her husband to visit her. His hint had been ignored, and it distressed him. According to the law, Lorrimer or some qualified person should come, but no one came. There was such a hopeless prejudice against the insane, and he supposed Sir John Lorrimer to be affected by it. He excused himself in a letter, and expressed his desire that the asylum doctor should make quite sure that Lady Lorrimer was completely recovered before she was released. Doctor Chapman pondered over the letter and put it away. Once she was cured, he wished to be done with the case, and, if her husband had used any urgency, he was prepared to let her go at any time. Lorrimer had chosen, however, to let the decision rest wholly and entirely with him. If Lady Lorrimer were showing signs of becoming morbid, she might spend another year at the Grange, and his own interests were sufficiently involved to make him regard this as quite possible. Agnes, the attendant, frequently said that her charge was entirely sane, except for her natural carelessness about her clothes, and her frequent desire to pray alone in the chapel in the grounds. Religious mania might be taking the place of suicidal mania, and time alone could tell to what direction Cathy's inherent weakness might tend. Others had friends who came to see them; but Cathy seemed strangely friendless. Her aunt, Lady Carstairs, had not written to her, and Doctor Chapman felt angered at the attitude of these people, who cast out their own flesh and blood and renounced her, because they regarded insanity as more damaging than actual crime. He became more actively attentive to her, for, somewhere in his heart, he was not altogether satisfied.

CHAPTER XXIX

It took Robert Amyas some days of careful thought before he could formulate any definite plan. He intended to see Cathy and to get into Welldon Grange. He had thought of writing to Doctor Chapman, asking for an appointment to discuss the case of some imaginary relative whom he proposed to place under lock and key; but he gave up the idea, as he fancied that he might only get as far as the consulting-room. He wanted to investigate the whole place, and then he thought of something which promised a better chance.

Robert had been a poet of the minor order, and at times he had done a little journalism. He was well known to several editors, and it occurred to him that, if he visited Welldon Grange with a reporter's notebook in his hand and an introduction from a well-known weekly paper, he could take nearly a whole day in the asylum, and ask as many questions as he pleased. Doctors had a universal desire to propitiate the Press, and he was pretty sure to be received with welcome. He went to the office of *The Open Gate,* a paper which prided itself on its strong modern tone, and walked into the editor's comfortable room.

"I want a job, Alfred," he said, in his tired, unenthusiastic way, "I've begun to take an interest in lunatic asylums. It seems to me that so many people I know should be inside, that I have become curious to find out what these places are really like."

Alfred Reves laughed. He was a lean man, and he sat in his shirt-sleeves, for the day was oppressively hot.

"I'll take two thousand words from you, Bob," he said, blinking his tired eyes; "Hanwell, I suppose?"

"Hanwell be damned. I want a fashionable resort, somewhere where you can meet dukes and duchesses—if they ever go mad? Tell me about Welldon Grange, for instance—that is where all the Park Lane lunatics congregate, isn't it?"

He fixed the matter up quickly, and came out into the street again. The initial part of the business had been easy enough. The next step was to go to the place itself, and Amyas took the first train to the little country station. He looked about him with keen interest as he walked along the narrow footpath outside the high walls. Cathy was in there, and within the next few hours he would have seen and spoken to her. He felt a fear grip him lest she should be dreadfully changed, but he tried to think of nothing except that he was to explain to her that he was there to help her to escape. If there was no other way, it must be done by bribery, and if Cathy were once free, he had planned a way by which he could hide her from recapture. All he needed was twelve hours' start. The plan was not difficult, once Cathy was out of the asylum. Lilian and he would meet her, and be waiting for her in a car. They would take her across to Ireland that night. By morning, Cathy would be out of England, and Robert had already put his shooting-box, on the border of County Limerick, in order. It was a tiny little place, whither he very seldom went, standing in the heart of a huge, rambling domain in the foot-hills of the blue mountains of Slieve Na Mon. For years he had never gone near it; it was a wild spot where no one ever came, and the one-storied house, standing on a plateau over a rushing, brown river, was comfortable and promised great rest and quiet. Miles of rhododendrons spread over the ravines, and there was the eternal sound of flowing water in the air. At every season of the year it was beautiful, but its remoteness had formerly made no kind of appeal to Robert's sophistication. At last "Parteen," as the house was called, was to be of definite use to him, and when he and Lilian had decided that it was, above all else, the place for Cathy, they had immediately arranged with Miss Batten that she was to go there in advance. Beyond a wire heralding their coming, they could give her no word of how things went with them, but she was to have everything prepared, and was to take care of Cathy when Lilian had to return to London. So far, they had not told Lady Carstairs anything. They both felt that it was best for her to be spared the knowledge until she could also be told that Cathy was free.

All this was planned, and Amyas felt that, as there was money enough for a sufficiently large bribe, he could count upon one of the attendants to take it, but until he saw Cathy he could not tell how far her dreadful confinement had made her helpless, even when help was near. If Lorrimer was prepared to fight to get her sent back, he would have to reckon with a publicity which might not be altogether to his taste. Amyas thought of him with a rage of scorn. The man was a hopeless coward, and he was now well in the lime-light. Probably he would never raise the question, but he and Doctor Henstock would at least have to face a certain amount of plain speech.

As he considered the subject, he came to the entrance gates and went in. He had not advised Doctor Chapman of his coming, but a short distance within the grounds he met a square-built man with a panama on the back of his head, who hailed him and asked what his business was.

Robert lifted his hat and explained himself.

"*The Open Gate,* oh yes, a very admirable paper. I hope you are going to give us a good show," Doctor Bracy said, introducing himself. "I am the house doctor. You will see how well the patients are cared for."

Amyas was struck at once by the grounds, they were so righteously and rigidly well kept, and afar he saw groups of people sitting in chairs along the sunny lawn. It was his business to be polite, and he remarked upon the flowering shrubs, and the spic and span effect of the place.

"Quite a little Utopia for the insane," he said, searching with scrutinising eyes the paths which converged from the main avenue.

He was brought into the Grange and conducted through the central part of the house, where he saw many of the patients, and at once two or three of them ran to him and wished to make him listen to their story. There was doom in the air, and he listened, making notes, to Doctor Bracy's sing-song tones.

"I will not bring you to the infirmary or the 'Incorrigibles' ward. You must be acclimatised to stand that experience," he said, when Robert had seen the billiard-room and the recreation-room. "We are having a band this afternoon to amuse the patients, and, perhaps, if you will lunch with me, you might like to sit and listen, and see us all, at home, as it were."

"But this is not my idea of an asylum," Robert said, smiling and looking at Doctor Bracy, who was inwardly thinking that he looked over-worked and by no means strong. The type of man who, sooner or later, gets a nervous breakdown and not infrequently becomes a temporary inmate of such places as Welldon Grange. "Where are the chains and manacles, and where is a padded cell? I don't feel that I am living up to my professional high-water mark unless I can see something of the kind."

"The padded cell is only used when patients become entirely unmanageable," Doctor Bracy explained. "It is the last resort. The lot of a house doctor is by no means easy," he went on, as he led Robert by an outside passage, avoiding Wards II and III, to the courtyard at the back. "One is permitted no likes or dislikes, and at times it is very trying to have to appear harsh—but there it is! I get abused morning, noon and night, and I have been attacked with violence more than once. We had a very sad case only yesterday. A man of really brilliant capacity, who was, unfortunately, a dipsomaniac, had so far recovered that he had been a week on 'parole.' He was allowed to go to the village, and his discharge was ready. Just to give you an idea of how little any lunatic may be trusted, he went off as usual, and did not return. When the warders found him, he was mad drunk and had stripped himself of his clothes. He was shouting and singing, and they were forced to overpower him in the end. To-day, he is lying in the hospital with a fractured jaw, and one of the warders has a broken leg." Doctor Bracy mopped his face with a red silk handkerchief, and Amyas said nothing. The man had been regarded as cured, and he might have sat next to Cathy at meals. The idea was sickening and he drew a quick breath of horror; but he only made a note in his reporter's book and said nothing.

"There is a padded cell," Doctor Bracy said, with the air of a showman, and a group of wardresses scuttled away as he glanced at them. Someone quite near was moaning persistently, and Amyas went into the gloom behind the door and stood there, while Doctor Bracy closed it.

Surely they had never put Cathy in such a place? Amyas, who never prayed, said something like a prayer at that moment, and then Doctor Bracy threw the door open again.

"The walls, as you see, are so constructed that no patient can dash out his brains in an access of frenzy," he said, in the same cheerful voice. "It is necessary detention, but there is no real hardship attached, unless in the strait-jacket cases, and they must be protected against themselves. For instance, a woman in a frenzy will tear her arms raw or pull out her hair to make a case against a wardress. It sounds harsh, I know, but a short-sighted lunatic, for example, cannot be permitted her glasses, as she may try to swallow them—or clothing fine enough to tear. We have to be watchful as to those details, and there is a reason for everything."

"If I were to be shut up in that hole for a day, I should have a reckoning with some one," Amyas said grimly.

"Ah, but then you are *compos mentis,* and it is quite different," Doctor Bracy replied airily.

As Doctor Chapman was away for the day, Doctor Bracy entertained Robert in his own rooms. He was quite ready to talk openly, and he told Robert story after story of cases which had come under his care.

"The old complaint that there is no treatment is quite unfounded," he said. "It is literally impossible to do more than we do here."

"And do you ever, by chance, get a really sane person shut up here?" Amyas asked; he had been very silent most of the time.

"We have almost always the certification of two doctors, but if the case is uncertified and becomes what we call an 'urgent,' we can ourselves certify at once. You can't neglect a lunatic, or allow him to be at large."

"And are there no mistakes made? For instance, has no one ever bribed two doctors to certify? It seems rather easy, looked at from the outside."

"No fear! Too risky." Doctor Bracy sucked his toothpick. "Insanity is the slyest thing in the world, and I am thinking now of one special case; the case of a really charming lady."

Amyas moved a little and looked out of the window.

"She had tried to take her life; sufficient evidence to show that there was something very wrong."

"Isn't it rather a matter of opinion?" Amyas said idly.

"There are no two opinions on the subject. She had certainly attempted suicide.

"I noticed a few symptoms when I visited her the evening of her arrival; one of the doctors who had certified her insane brought her here, and had deemed it best to tell her nothing. Now, I am all for honesty, Mr. Amyas, and I don't like deceit. At the time I felt that the poor lady was ill-used; and the shock of realisation was necessarily acute. She was cared for in the infirmary, as she had not entirely recovered from a long illness, and there were times when I was nearly—not quite, but very nearly convinced that there had been some mistake in her case."

"Did you let her out?" Amyas asked suddenly. Could it be possible that he was hunting a cold line, and that Monica had put Cathy into some other hell, where there was no possible hope of escape?

"Luckily we did not," Doctor Bracy said. "Caution has to be our watchword here. I discussed the matter with Chapman, and we both agreed to wait. The results proved us to be right, for within a few months of comparative liberty, the patient tried again to destroy herself. She stole a pair of scissors from the work-basket of her wardress, and managed to get away into the bushes. When found, she had cut a strip of cambric from her petticoat, and was evidently just about to strangle herself." His face looked sad at the recollection.

"My God," Amyas said slowly. "And what did you do then?"

Doctor Bracy fiddled with his glass and sighed. "She was under the discipline of the Incorrigible ward for three weeks, and, while there, the reports all showed that her sanity had given way hopelessly. At the end of that time she became quiet, and now she is one of our best patients. If you like, I will introduce you to her this afternoon. She seems oddly cut off. Of course, I cannot tell you her name, as everything here is very confidential, but she may do so herself. Yes," he spoke reflectively, "Chapman remarked to me only yesterday that she was isolated, and he felt quite strongly about it. She must have had many friends, and there is her husband, who has not even troubled to fulfil the undertaking that he will see her—did I say she was married? No? It is this rooted convention, which makes the sane shrink away from their unhappy relatives, until, as in her case, they add desolation to the difficulties with which we have to contend. I believe that she might be almost regarded as cured, only that there is marked hesitation on the part of the petitioner to take any action. It is all very sad, very sad."

"Perhaps I might cheer her up," Amyas said, not raising his eyes. "But the padded room. It's pretty ghastly."

"Believe me, it was necessary," Doctor Bracy said firmly; "and, at the end of the time, she was perfectly docile, she even admits now that she knows her brain to be affected."

Amyas felt as though Doctor Bracy, with his genial smile, had suddenly struck him in the face, but he struggled to hide his feelings. He must show nothing outwardly, and his heart sank like lead. Tortured, driven and forsaken, Cathy had bowed to the rod, and now they had forced the lie upon her and made her accept it. She herself admitted that she was mad, and, if so, it looked indeed as though he had come there far too late.

Cathy was feeling more than usually hopeless and depressed that soft, August day. Old longings came upon her, and when she was told that the band of a neighbouring regiment was to play in the grounds, she only wished to remain indoors.

"Don't ask me to listen to music, Agnes," she said, "it is too full of memories, and I have to hush them to sleep. When they awake they make me wretched."

"Come out, it will do you good," Agnes replied. "And, besides, I'd like to be out myself." She knew by now that she could manage Cathy by personal appeal. "Put on a pretty hat and make yourself look nice. I always say that none of the beauties in the papers are half as nice as you."

Cathy looked at her own reflection in the mirror with an unsmiling regard. She was stamped with the marks of mental suffering, and there were heavy lines around her eyes. She had no pride in herself. It mattered nothing what she looked like, but Agnes was ridiculously proud of her, and, to please the girl, Cathy put on a straw hat with a blue scarf around it—it was one she had bought in the days when these things counted and mattered. Her dress was tumbled and tossed, and she would not change it, but she put on a string of cheap beads which were a gift from Agnes to herself.

"Now, Agnes, now; can't I do as I am? If the people who come in to hear the band think I am nothing but a bundle of rags, what does it matter?" She laughed. "That is one of the only advantages of being mad. It explains everything."

"Don't talk of it," Agnes said; "here is your parasol. Now, if you had a nice pair of gloves . . ."

"I'll do as I am," Cathy said; "don't try me too far. I hope there won't be strangers about," she drew close to Agnes; "I don't like strangers, Aggy Baggy, you know I don't, they stare and stare until they are nothing but eyes."

"They are only admiring you."

"Well, I wish they wouldn't; I begin to think that I am growing cloth ears like poor Miss Lucy Clarke. Did you hear her at lunch? She asked that new man, with a face like Othello, to tell her if her ears were really made of red flannel."

Agnes opened the door and Cathy went out and down the steps. The scene was gay enough, except for the numbers of warders and wardresses, and the queer faded look of most of the women's clothes. Just then everyone was "behaving nicely," but they all knew that at any moment someone might burst into cries or tears, and one elderly gentleman in a bath-chair was already wailing pitifully, bemoaning his lot to the indifferent crowd.

"Let me have a chair well away from the rest," Cathy said, grasping the arm of Agnes in sudden alarm. "I don't want to see new people."

"Stay where you are and I'll get you one," Agnes replied and she was carrying the chair across the smooth lawn when Doctor Bracy intercepted her. He was with a young-looking man who had a note-book in his hand.

"Ah, I see that our friend has come out," Doctor Bracy said pleasantly; "that's good, that's good. How is she to-day, Agnes?"

Agnes replied that she was very well, and she noticed that the young man stared as though transfixed to where Cathy was standing, gazing at the distant trees. The attendant felt pleased. Her patient was a genuine beauty, in spite of the fact that she looked worn and thin, and the stranger was offering his tribute of unspoken praise.

"We are just going to have a little talk," Doctor Bracy said, relieving Agnes of the chair. "Mr. Amyas is anxious to meet some of our patients. Come along," he added to Robert, "or perhaps you will wait a moment while I go first."

Amyas watched Doctor Bracy go up to Cathy and touch her arm. She started, as though awakened from sleep; she had been listening to the music with wrapt intensity; and after a few minutes' conversation Cathy sat down, pulling the chair round so that her back was to the throng.

"She says she will speak to you," Doctor Bracy hurried back, and was clutched at as he passed by a man who was wearing a knotted silk handkerchief on his head, instead of a hat. "Now, Mr. Coppley, no trouble, please." He turned to Robert. "She wants to meet you alone. I suggested an introduction, but she was firm, and it seems quite right to humour her. If you will go up to where she is sitting, there is a seat beside her where you can sit as long as you like."

"Must the wardress be in attendance?"

"Nominally, but not in fact. Agnes, you will be within call in case you are needed."

Amyas walked across the grass. If Cathy's life in the asylum was at times as unreal as a dream to her, Robert felt at that moment that he, too, was the victim of some wild delusion. Cathy, the real, living Cathy, was close to him, sitting in a chair with her parasol over her head. How often he had seen her in just the same graceful attitude, and now it was as though only he and she were real and the crowd of mad men and women were part of some ridiculous nightmare. Could he not go and put his hands on her shoulders and watch her glad surprise? Then the grey wave of fact raced up and wiped out the memories. Cathy had suffered in the terrible living coffin of the padded room, and, it might be, that, when she turned her head, there would be no recognition in her eyes.

He walked slowly, and coming round her chair he stood before her. Doctor Bracy and Agnes were both watching him, and it mattered so much what he should do and how he did it. He dug his stick into the mossy turf and leaned down, for she had not raised her head. Thank God, the band was playing a march, and the noise of it made it impossible to overhear anything.

"Cathy," he said, "Cathy!"

She looked up at him, startled, shaken, even terrified.

"Be very careful," he said, "don't let them notice anything. I have come here to help you to get away."

Her eyes softened and changed and then filled with tears.

"But perhaps you don't understand, Robert," she said. "You see, you dear, kind Robert, I am mad."

CHAPTER XXX

He sat down beside her, and signed to Doctor Bracy that they could be left alone, and then he leaned forward and looked at her steadily, his own face reflecting the sorrow of hers.

"I dare not take your hands," she said. "You do not know the power of the conventions until you come here. If I did, Aggy would try and sweep me off—but I am really holding them, Robert, and I don't want ever to let them go again."

"Listen, Cathy," he said, speaking very quietly. "I am going to take you away."

"Take me away?" her voice was full of astonishment. "But not now that you know what has happened?"

"Nothing has happened; you are yourself, unchanged, Cathy, unchanged."

She shook her head. "That is not so, I have seen too much and suffered too much. I know they never meant to be cruel, but they believed me mad. . . ." She hesitated and lowered her eyes. "You see, Monica had . . ."

"I know all about that," Amyas said vehemently. "We won't speak either one or other of two names."

She raised her eyes again and a wistful smile touched her mouth.

"It's wonderful to see you, Robert, and now that you have come here, will you come again *often?* It will make it even bearable to have that to count upon."

Amyas reflected for a moment. He had intended to tell her the broad outlines of the plan of escape, but now he decided against this. Cathy was not equal to any such tense strain as it would place upon her, and he could perhaps do it all himself, with the help of Lilian. He had found Doctor Bracy more sympathetic than he had hoped for, and Lilian could probably manœuvre the situation. Unless the petitioner acted, there was very little chance of the asylum officials taking any steps to bring her back.

Amyas dug his stick into the ground again, at the thought of Lorrimer. Yes, it was very much better that Cathy should know nothing, and he must talk to her now and reassure her.

"How do you think I got here?" he asked. "I am supposed to be a journalist, Cathy, one of the damned, and I was shown over the Grange by Doctor Bracy. I don't dislike the man, he has good points."

Cathy looked around her and looked back at Robert. "You know that I came here without any idea of why I was being brought, and they keep on telling me that I tried to kill myself. Robert, Robert, isn't it silly? I, who loved every day of my life, and I have always been a cannibal in that way. But I suppose they are right . . ." she wavered again.

"I went to tea with Aunt Amy last week," Robert said; "she talks of nothing but you, and she does not know where you are."

Cathy frowned slightly as though perplexed. "Didn't they give it out? Do you mean that it has all been kept a secret?"

"Yes, until Miss Batten and I discovered the facts."

"Batkins, poor darling Batkins. They sent her away. They wanted to get rid of her. Where is she; can't she come and see me?" Cathy's cheeks took a shade of their old delicate pink, and she looked animated and almost gay. "I shall have a series of parties," she said; "a funny place to give them, but, still, I shall give them. Lilian shall come, and Twyford—he hasn't forgotten me?" She looked doubtfully at Amyas. "Can you picture him here? Aunt Amy must come to me at once, for even if I am out of my mind I don't feel any different. How I should love to see Lilian. Are you and she friends again?"

"Yes, why not, after all?"

He leaned back carelessly and smoked, his eyes on the bright glitter of the brass instruments of the band. Cathy must be led to talk of outside things, and here was a subject.

"It was merely a case of misdirected energy. Lilian and I were meant to be friends, and we most unwisely got married. She found out the mistake and admitted it, whereas I was such a conventional sort of cove, Cathy, though I prided myself upon my individuality, that I was a fool at that time. Once we were both free we got sane again, and when the need cropped up, *à propos* of your own self, we found that we had a long standing friendship behind us. We are friends, the best of friends, and it has made things square. Hinton is a good fellow, which is more than I ever was or will be; and was I, or she for that matter, to forgo a sound, reliable slice of comfort, merely because blatant idiots raise their eyebrows and say beastly things?"

"Oh, Robert, I am so glad," Cathy said. "What a wonderful day this is for me. I can't believe it yet. Go on talking; just talk of the things we used to know about, and let us forget."

He talked on steadily. There was a great deal to say, and Amyas sought for any trifling subject which would amuse her. To test her a little, he spoke of George Barlow. "Janey Greenaway is in the lock-up," he said, "she called the Prime Minister names outside the House, and the police nabbed her. I heard that Barlow insisted on making an extremely witty speech at Bow Street when he went to bail her out, but the authorities won't let her go."

"Poor Janey," Cathy moved her hands vaguely. "I hate to think of her locked up, Robert. You know that I ended by realising that people were unfair to Barlow? He was very kind to me that day when I fell on the road, and the other time that I saw him, he only wanted to warn me about Jack."

"I know *everything,* Cathy, there is no need to explain," Amyas said decisively. "Now what other gossip have I? The hat of the moment is worn with a chin-strap, and women go to dances without any backs to their evening dresses. Does that interest you?"

"Frightfully," Cathy laughed back at him. "Bring me one when you come again, Robert dear."

"Anything else?" he asked. "What shall I bring you, Cathy? Flowers, books . . . is there anything you want?"

"You bring me better things than any of those," she said, her eyes wet, "you brought me a bit of the old days." She pressed her hands over her heart. "I am often broken by it all. For it has been very dark at times; even you cannot know how dark."

"I can guess at it," he said in a low voice.

"There really is such a thing as delirium," she said, striving to explain; "the most woeful and awful thing. It gathers against me slowly, and all the things of the spirit seem to be tumbled into a black night."

The cadence of melancholy in her voice reached him like a whisper, and he longed to take her in his arms and hold her close until she could tell him that she was rested.

He had loved Cathy when she was as glorious as the lilies of the field, but now that she was dimmed of beauty and broken in spirit, he loved her with a love so wide and vast that it ached in him because of its very greatness. She had changed considerably, but the alteration had not really impaired her beauty in his eyes, she had turned from the sordid sights around her, and looked steadfastly towards another world. Alas! he thought, that she had nothing here to claim her. With a wonderful patience she had accepted the heart-breaking existence, dead idleness, hopeless dawns and unalleviated sorrow. Cathy had been waiting when he found her, and the only thing she waited for was death.

Doctor Bracy joined them a few minutes later, and Robert had warned Cathy not to admit that they had known one another before; the fact that they had a mutual friend would account for their long talk, and he watched her carefully to see whether she was able to keep up the pretence.

"Doctor Bracy," she said, smiling at him, "I owe you a 'thank you' because you have done a good deed to-day. Mr. Amyas and I have a friend in common, and he will tell her to come and see me."

"That's right, that's right," Doctor Bracy dragged up a chair and sat down. He was pleased to see her looking so well, and felt sure that Amyas had been favourably impressed.

"One forgets," Cathy went on, "that the world is full of accidents, and a nice accident is a help." She looked wistful again. "Only here, one can't expect to hear voices calling one to pack up and go to the ends of the earth. Where *are* the ends, Doctor Bracy, or is this one of them?"

He shook his head and looked significantly at Amyas. How could he tell that Cathy had always talked like that?

"I am not a geographical expert," he said, uneasily; "perhaps you are right."

"And yet," Cathy looked towards Amyas, "one never really does see the shadow of the coming event. I did not see it. Or do you think I did, when I remembered:

"'John York, John York, where have you gone, John York?'"

"I can complete the quotation," Amyas said:

"'King of my heart, King of my heart, I am out on the trail of thy bugles.'

You see, I also read my Gilbert Parker."

Doctor Bracy regarded them both with some astonishment, but they evidently understood one another quite well.

At last Amyas got up and held Cathy's hand for a second.

"I will give your message to Mrs. Hinton," he said. "The external world does exist," he smiled, his tired face lighting suddenly. "There are policemen and perambulators, just the same as ever, and it goes on as usual. She will be so glad to hear of you."

Cathy grew suddenly anxious and she caught his hand again. "Let her come soon," she said, with a touch of entreaty in her voice. "I've been so long shut away from everybody."

Doctor Bracy accompanied Amyas to the edge of the grass plot. "I am sure it did her a great deal of good," he said, "and I shall be glad for her to see another friend. We do all we can, but sometimes outside people can help."

"Mrs. Hinton is sure to come soon," Amyas said. "She is devoted to Miss Rossiter."

"Ah, I see you have humoured her as to her name," Doctor Bracy smiled. "It is only a small thing, but it suggests derangement. Poor Lady Lorrimer . . ." he stopped and put a finger on Robert's sleeve. "Tell me, is there anything wrong between her and Sir John? It seems odd to us that he should not come here, though by law, he should be compelled to visit her. Of course I never gossip about patients, but it is odd—very odd."

"I know nothing of Sir John Lorrimer," Robert replied, "except that he is the personification of the bourgeoisie. A bishop with the domestic views of a Pasha."

"Oh dear me," Doctor Bracy said in tones of perplexity, "I fancied that he was immensely respected."

"So he is," Amyas said shortly, "by all the people who do not know him, Doctor Bracy."

"Well, he never comes here," Doctor Bracy replied, in the same perplexed voice; "though I know Chapman went so far as to remind him of his responsibility. Good-bye, Mr. Amyas, and send me a copy of the paper. I hope you have nothing but good to say of us."

In Lilian's boudoir, Robert poured out his story. He raged as he paced the small room, as she had never believed he could have raged, and he gave her a quick summary of his experiences of the day.

"They have nearly driven her mad," he said, standing before her, "and it is no thanks either to Lorrimer or that woman, that she isn't a shrieking lunatic. The very fact of her being able to stand it proves her sanity. But oh, my God, Lil, to see her there——"

"What can we do now?" Lilian asked, her eyes bright and her chin set. "Let me *do* something, Robert, whatever it is."

"There's plenty for you to do, but the original plan has to be altered." He sat down and became quiet again. "I did not dare to burden Cathy with the suspense of a night of strain, she can be told nothing until we get her out.

Down there, the doctors are beginning to suspect that Lorrimer isn't keen on having her out; and I thought Bracy quite a decent fellow, so long as he wasn't treating one as a lunatic. He is naturally kindly in his way, and might be managed. You have to do the managing, old girl."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes, with the least delay possible. You must go there and ask to see her, and get Bracy to let her drive with you. Don't let him have any suspicion at all."

Lilian smiled. "I think I can do that," she said, nodding at Amyas. "I am to induce the doctor to let her come out with me, and then I just whisk her off, and at night we cross to Ireland. You will come too, won't you?"

"I shall wait for you in the car, and then we shall motor to Chester and catch the night mail. She will be frightfully tired, but the main thing is to get her out."

The hours dragged for her and Amyas until they were able to start off again to Welldon Grange, and Lilian, soberly clad, and quiet of manner, presented herself at the gates. She had left Robert at the hotel which the village boasted, and was to return there to pick him up. The large car, Lilian's dignified air of command and her cold, strong manner, impressed Doctor Chapman favourably.

"I rushed down here at once, or I should have called and brought Doctor Henstock with me," Lilian said in her perfect manner.

"I hear that she spent rather a restless night," Doctor Chapman said, placing his finger tips one against the other. "It might have been best had you waited a week or two. Yet, since you are here, you must not be disappointed."

"I was going to suggest," Lilian said, and she was glad that Doctor Chapman did not know that her heart was beating in a furious scurry of excitement, "that a little drive with me might be good for her. Lady Lorrimer has lived an open air life, and if we drove quietly along the roads for an hour or so, it would amuse her."

Doctor Chapman looked searchingly at Lilian. Was it just possible that he doubted her good faith? He looked at her well gloved hands, her dark dress, plain and expensive, and the string of pearls around her throat. Mentally he visualised the big car and the impressively respectable chauffeur. Mrs. Hinton was not the kind of woman who expected refusal, and he looked at her again. The string of pearls decided him, though he could not have explained why.

"Very likely it would be a nice change," he said quite readily, once he had made up his mind. "Then, if you will follow me, I will bring you to the drawing-room. I think Lady Lorrimer is probably there, if she is not in our little chapel."

Lilian followed him demurely. She enjoyed the sense of intrigue to the full, and she knew that it was her personality which had vanquished any doubts Doctor Chapman might have felt, nor did the knowledge distress her in the least. She said afterwards that she would have let him kiss her, had he been that sort of man. The price is nothing when the result is beyond price.

Looking around her with pained eyes, she took in the surroundings which had been Cathy's for so long now, and her pity broke loose in her, but she walked as though she was indifferent to it all.

Cathy was sitting in the ornate drawing-room, and a big, blousy-looking woman crouched down by the side of her chair, talking with wild incoherence of her own lot. She was accusing a whole range of people whom she held responsible, and when she saw Lilian she shouted to her to go away.

"We don't want you, we don't want you. Go away—you are mad," she cried, waving her hands, but as her eyes met those of Doctor Chapman she faltered, and hid like a child, behind Cathy's chair, peering out from the side.

At the sight of Lilian, Cathy got up and came to her with out-held hands, and they neither of them spoke as Lilian folded her close to her heart. She only made low sounds of comfort, as she stroked the bowed head with tender hands, and then Doctor Chapman spoke, and at his voice Cathy lifted her head.

"Let me rest here," she said. "Don't tell me that I must not excite myself. Feel my pulse, Doctor Chapman, it is not beating fast. You see it is so long since I have had anywhere to rest myself like this."

Lilian lifted Cathy's face, her hand under her chin.

"Robert brought me news of you," she said, smiling at the heavy eyes raised to hers, "and Doctor Chapman says you may come out with me for a little in the car."

Cathy shook her head. "I would rather see you here in some room where we may be alone. I should be afraid if I went out."

For a second Lilian nearly panicked, but she stood her ground and spoke encouragingly.

"I am just as fond of fresh air as ever, and I am sure it will do you good," she said, and she turned towards Doctor Chapman. "Can't you persuade her?"

Appealed to directly, Doctor Chapman smiled, and spoke in his deep, suave tones, and Lilian watched Cathy, who fixed her eyes on him like a dutiful and frightened child.

"If you say that I am to go I will go," she said, and then she turned eagerly to Lilian. "Once, I thought of nothing but getting away from here. That was before I believed, but now that they all say I am mad, the idea of outside places frightens me. Lil, if you had come two months ago I would have begged you to take me away with you."

"Be quite calm," Doctor Chapman kept a steady eye on his patient; "I give Mrs. Hinton full permission to take you for a drive outside the grounds."

"Without anyone else? Without Agnes even?"

"Alone with your friend," he replied.

Cathy had shown so much reluctance that he felt the concession to be a harmless one, and he accepted Mrs. Hinton's charming smile of gratitude with a pleasant sense of satisfaction.

"Perhaps you will lunch at my house," he said, as Cathy went away to put on her hat. "It would give my wife great pleasure to meet you."

"May I leave it open?" Lilian said mendaciously. "I ought to get back early, but so much depends upon Lady Lorrimer."

"Certainly, certainly," Doctor Chapman agreed, and he went to the door with them, folding a rug round Cathy's knees as he had folded the rug once before around Doctor Henstock. He watched them go, they were driving very slowly, and Lilian appeared to be talking quietly to Cathy. Everything promised well. Mrs. Hinton would realise that doctors of asylums were not ogres, and even Cathy herself had proved this fact. Had she not been entirely reluctant to leave, even for a short drive? True, a few weeks before, she would have considered such a chance an opening for escape; she had altered wonderfully, and psychologist though he professed to be, Doctor Chapman regarded the change as a personal tribute. He admired Mrs. Hinton immensely; her great sanity struck him at once, and he went to his house and described her to his wife, not omitting to mention the fact that she was wearing a string of pearls which must be worth over a thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XXXI

SIR JOHN LORRIMER had affairs of State to occupy his mind. He was a member of nearly a dozen select committees, and his name was constantly before the public. Without knowing exactly when it occurred, he found that he had virtually left the Progressive Party, who were never at any time either specially progressive or independent, and was acting in union with the older Conservatives. Any man may alter his mind—it is the privilege of the free, and Lorrimer now generally found himself on the same platform as Bishops and high Tories. The only point which made his new position a little difficult, was his secret connection with Monica Henstock. He could not do without Monica, and they both believed that their union was as sacred as any marriage. All this was very well, and he could have ignored the unlikely chance of discovery, except for the fact that he was now committed to taking a prominent part in a campaign to preserve the sanctity of the home. He had a stock speech, in which he argued eloquently that any lessening of the stringency of the divorce laws would cause ninety per cent. of the happily married subjects in the British Isles to rush violently into expensive legislation, and moral anarchy would supervene. Homes hitherto of unimpeachable "sanctity" would collapse, and divorce must eat like canker through the fair land of England. It was, therefore, agitating to realise now and then, that, if a few facts of his private life became known, his whole career must go down dishonourably into the mud. People had talked of Cathy's disappearance, and had wondered over it. Many stories had been fabricated to account for the fact that Lorrimer was wifeless, and it was generally assumed that Cathy had done something disgraceful. She had been widely spoken of as a beautiful woman, and very little else was known of her.

Hammersly was believed to be in possession of the real facts, and he was significantly silent. He admitted once, however, under a more than usually persistent cross-examination at his club, that there was something far from creditable to Lady Lorrimer in the background.

Monica attracted no notice whatever. She had an air of severity that would have deceived the most suspicious, and whenever Lorrimer was seen with her in public, which was not often, she only added to the atmosphere of quiet rectitude with which he was surrounded. Other women he avoided, he had grown to hate them, and often he was sulky and irritable to Monica herself.

Deep down in his heart he was eternally contrasting his life, successful as it now was, with the golden burst of summer when he and Cathy had been happy together. He had ceased to love her, he said so frequently to himself, and he had put Monica in her place in all except the open avowal of her, but he was dissatisfied and restless. Cathy was hopelessly mad, and had again attempted to take her life; he did not wish to see her. When he received a letter from Doctor Chapman telling him that his obligation was pressing to visit the Grange, he had torn it to fragments and lost his temper with Perrin, his valet, who had not been guilty of any offence.

There was an unspoken pact of silence between him and Monica on the subject, and he had never asked her a single question about Cathy, or what had happened the day she brought her there.

Usually he went to see Monica in the evenings, and they were arranging a prospective holiday.

They managed their affairs very carefully; Monica was to go to Swanage a week in advance of Lorrimer and take a room at the hotel. Later on, he was to appear, and Perrin was an adept at arrangements of this kind, so that outwardly there was no cause for suspicion. They did not even dare to laugh at the fact that their mutual appearance of intense respectability was an invaluable safeguard, and though there were moments when they both quailed, and when a knock on the door of Lorrimer's bedroom made them shake like convicted criminals, they had never in fact been even suspect.

Again, the heavier burden fell upon Monica. She had none of Lorrimer's indifference to everything except detection, and she suffered desperately while she submitted to the inevitable.

It was a wild, blowy evening, and the hot spell had altered into the cold of a shrewish summer's day. Lorrimer was to take Monica out to dinner, and then they would return to his flat. He bought some flowers from a battered-looking woman at a street corner, and walked onwards with them in his hand. After all, Monica was his only real friend. He was beginning to suspect Hammersly, who had shown a hardihood and even insolence of manner to him more than once, since he had declined to recommend him for a job. In the end he had recommended him and Hammersly was drawing a good salary for a thoroughly idle berth to which he had no claim, but there had been a humiliating interview which stripped away any illusions Lorrimer might otherwise have preserved.

Once he had been friendly towards the world, but he was so no longer. He hummed to himself as he went along, a bad sign with him; he had a resounding voice when he spoke, but, if he raised it into song, it became thin and flat. He thought on with steadily growing irritation. He had seen Amyas once, who cut him dead, and Twyford had done the same quite publicly. Before he left the flat he had received a very curious note from Lady Carstairs, addressing him no longer as "Jack," and informing him stiffly that she wished him to understand from her that their acquaintance was at an end. They were out after him like a pack of hounds, and he hated them. What fault of his was it that his wife was a lunatic? He had every right to round on old Lady Carstairs and accuse her of having known that there was lunacy in the family. That point had never been cleared up, and he frequently dwelt upon it. His laurels did not please him, for he was worried and slandered. Hammersly had been damned impertinent and had almost threatened him; had been on the point of dragging Monica into the controversy. The man was a cad, Lorrimer reflected; Cathy was right when she declined to have anything to do with him. Anyhow, his dirty mouth was stopped now, and he had got his blackmail, but where in such a world did one find a reliable friend? The men he worked with and for showed no real interest in him, and he had outgrown his early pleasure in being on speaking terms with the Great. He wanted to marry Monica, and yet to make lunacy a cause for divorce was one of the proposals which he was pledged to fight. It was nearly funny, if one considered it. A revised divorce law might possibly free him from a mad wife, but on principle he must forgo that chance of liberty. It was just like everything else, he thought, all was dust and ashes.

He was not exactly in a lover's mood as he kissed Monica and sat down, placing the flowers on a table, but when he looked at her he thought she appeared worried and pale.

"I've had my *congé* from Lady Carstairs," he said, with a flat laugh. "Wretched old fool, I suppose she thinks I shall make a fuss."

Monica sat down and shaded her face with her hands.

"Jack, I have had two letters from Doctor Chapman. He feels, I am *sure,* that we are neglecting Cathy. I believe it will be necessary to go there."

"Why?"

"Because it creates a feeling of suspicion. I hate to talk of it at all, but it seems to me that something must be done. In any case," she looked up at him, "the others are sure to go there now, and how shall we look?"

Lorrimer bit the side of his finger and thought it over.

"Then perhaps you had better go," he said slowly.

"I?" Monica stared at him blankly. "*I* go there? Don't you see that it is impossible? I have borne a great deal for you, Jack, but I can't be expected to stand everything."

"Why shouldn't you go?" he said. "You took her there and you are a doctor. Besides, you told me that it was perfectly all right, and that she would settle down quite soon. She might be glad to see you."

Monica continued her fixed stare. In a way, she herself was responsible for his stupidity. In her effort to do nothing which would make him shrink from her in those early days, she had lied freely enough, so he was not to blame, but the time was over between them when there was further need for lies.

"I did not see her," she explained, speaking rapidly, "but I heard her. She was beating on a locked door and calling to me. Whatever happened later—well, you *must* realise that she still holds me responsible for having her locked up, and it is even possible that she thinks you do not know."

"Heard her beating on a locked door," he said vaguely. "You did not tell me that. My God! Yet, I suppose she *has* shaken down all right?"

"Doctor Chapman thinks that she is very much better, so much better, in fact, that she may be discharged quite soon."

They looked away from each other, and both of them were silent. They had succeeded in forgetting about Cathy, and now what were they going to do?

Lorrimer got up and stood on the hearthrug, his hands in his pockets, staring at the ground.

"If she is released she will go to her aunt, but it would be stupid to take risks. Can't you write to this fellow, Chapman, and say that he must be absolutely sure that she *is* cured? It hardly matters to me, as she won't be coming back to Kingslade in a hurry, but for her own sake one must be sure."

"Will you go down and see her? There is the legal obligation, in any case," Monica asked, and her voice faltered slightly. She was still afraid of Cathy—even a marred and broken Cathy who might pluck Lorrimer from her at the eleventh hour. He would feel regret and distress, and she had defended him from both; but even this must be risked.

"Damn the legal obligation. If I go, it may only make her worse," he said cautiously. "How would it be if I were to write a private letter to the asylum doctor to tell him that there was trouble between us before she went mad? If he understands this he won't be likely to want me there—

only it doesn't get rid of the difficulty where you are concerned."

Monica's mouth tightened; she was bitterly angry with him.

"You are hopelessly selfish," she said in a low, hurt voice; "and I have borne everything for you."

"You have said that twice," he replied; he felt in the mood to quarrel with her. He wanted to assert himself over someone—anyone; Monica was his slave, and so far he had never lashed her. "What is there which you have done that you want to remind me of?"

"Cathy was my friend and I loved her," Monica said in a stifled voice. "Have you forgotten that?"

"She was also my wife, and I did not marry her without having loved her deeply," Lorrimer's voice was grave and pompous. "It did not alter the fact that she was a lunatic and had to be put away."

Monica got to her feet and caught him by the arm.

"I certified her because you said you wanted an end to the strain. Cathy may have been unbalanced at the time, and she was certainly very ill, but I never believed her to be mad." The truth was out now, and Lorrimer looked at her, his face a ghastly white.

"Then you made me party to a fraud? You tell me *now,* that you did not believe her mad," he put her grasping hands from him. "Why have you told me? If you kept silence then, in common decency you might have continued to do so."

"I loved you, Jack, I loved you," Monica said hopelessly. "Can't you understand?"

He sat down again, like an angry god, who has been given an undesired offering. "I must admit that your method of showing it strikes me as strange. You told me that Cathy was mad, and what about Luke? He seemed to have no doubts."

Monica averted her face. "He was prepared. It's no use saying that you did not guess that from the first. Hammersly had a hold on him, and he was ready to agree."

The affronted virtue in Lorrimer's face was tremendous at that moment, but he kept silence for a time.

"The asylum doctors decided that she was mad." There was consolation in that thought, and Monica should have left it to him, but in the storm of her own hurt feelings she faced him again.

"Let us be done with pretence," she said, with a sweeping gesture of her arm. "They had only the facts to go upon which were given them by us."

"By you and Luke, surely. I had nothing to say to it."

"As you will. Anyhow, they had it to go upon that Cathy had dangerous suicidal tendencies. Whether her second attempt was a real one we shall never know. She may have been driven to it by the circumstances in which she found herself."

"My God," Lorrimer said, and his voice was rough and strained. "If all this ever comes out, it will be nearly hopeless for me to stand clear. Monica, you are raving. Come to your senses and speak like a reasonable being. We have the testimony of the doctors to protect us. There is no getting behind that."

"The only thing to do is to keep Cathy there," she said, returning quietly to her old place and taking up her knitting with hands which shook slightly. "I believe they must do so unless the petitioner acts, and they make a good thing out of it, but I want you to know, Jack, what it has all cost me. There are times when I would give everything to have Cathy out again. I dream of her, and I keep on thinking of her. It spoils all my happiness."

"And so you decided that it should also spoil mine," he said, looking revengefully at the bunch of flowers. "You have made me feel like a criminal. I came here to discuss plans for the fortnight at Swanage, and what sort of heart can I have for it now? I think you might have considered me before you chose to speak."

"If I cannot speak as I feel to you, now, what use is anything?" Monica said wearily. "I can get away on Saturday, and when do you come?"

"About the middle of next week," he said, but he had no thoughts for any plans. "What do you think the Carstairs' gang will find out, if they do go to the Grange?"

"Cathy is sure to tell them everything she knows—why should she not? Doctor Chapman is extremely tactful, but he may say that he expected you to go there, and that you did not go."

Lorrimer was obviously agitated and he moved restlessly in his chair.

"He has committed himself to the fact of her insanity," he remarked, "so that there is no chance of his saying that there was a mistake—what?"

"None," Monica said, listlessly.

She was wondering why it was that she loved Jack Lorrimer so faithfully. He had married Cathy, and it presupposed that he had once loved her. Yet now, when he knew everything that Monica could tell him, he only thought of how it would all affect him, and had hardly given Cathy a thought. Day by day, Monica had spent hours of misery when the memories of Cathy haunted her, and she had suffered acutely.

She could not honestly wish Cathy to be released, because the other bond was fixed and firm, but she was spared nothing of the mental torture which her own treachery had brought upon her.

"You should have been honest with me," Lorrimer said, waking from his troubled thoughts. "That was where you made a bad mistake. You let me down."

Honest with him! Monica very nearly laughed. She recalled how Lorrimer had hedged and baulked and shown a keen dislike for the very mention of the word "asylum." In all real fact, he had made it plain to her that he wished to know nothing. He must be innocent; he had to be preserved blameless in his own eyes. Now he was again prepared to claim that he was a dupe, and again he must be wrapped about in some comforting fiction. She wondered vaguely whether, if their own relations ever became public, he would rage and storm, and repeat the old accusation, "The woman beguiled me." And yet he looked secure and strong, and people trusted him. She loved him still, and would continue to love him, because she was fundamentally faithful, but she was bereft of her last illusion.

At the end of the interview they parted coldly, and Lorrimer dwelt heavily upon the necessity of caution.

"For God's sake let us be careful," he said broodingly. "I can't have talk, it's a bit too risky with all this in the background."

"I will be careful," Monica said humbly. She had no fight in her, and his decrees were her law.

CHAPTER XXXII

Lorrimer decided to walk home to his flat. He wanted physical exercise, and his mind was full of thorns. He regarded himself as outraged by the very woman whom he trusted, and he began to wonder if it would be possible to continue this now agitating *liaison*. It was hardly worth the strain it imposed, and he was angry with Monica. But the main question of importance was his own case. He assured himself that he had not the smallest suspicion that Monica had acted except upon principle, and that he would have stoutly refused to permit such a course of conduct had he guessed it. Somehow or other he bolstered up his sagging self-respect, and began to think more comfortably of the whole affair. Separated from Monica, he stood very well indeed. No husband can go dead against the fiat of two doctors, and he remembered how he had refused to believe that Cathy had so much as an attack of nerves. At the time, he attributed the fiction to Monica's feminine desire to account for Cathy's straying fancies. So far so good. His conscience was perfectly clear. If he had really said that he "wished the strain ended," it was a perfectly reasonable wish and one which anyone might have uttered in good faith. Monica had misunderstood him completely.

Hammersly had turned against him, and, so long as he continued his relations with Monica, would most certainly continue to use his power of blackmail. Hammersly was not fastidious, to say the least of it. Between them both the position was difficult. He became suddenly anxious about the proposed trip with Monica. He might be playing into Hammersly's hands. How did he know that he was not being watched? Perrin, his valet, might be a spy. His nerves jumped at the thought, and he strode on frowning and agitated. It would be better, possibly, to cut out the plan and have done with it. In any case, a week alone with Monica would only mean constant recriminations. He thought of former weeks with her, and cursed himself savagely. At one time they had been reckless, and sailed perilously close to the wind. There was an entry in a book at a little out-of-the-way hotel at Shanklin which would damn him completely. He had not been so well known then, and his leap into publicity had come rather suddenly to him. Now people recognised him, because his photograph was known through the breadth and length of England. There were piles of a brochure, of which he was the supposed author, and which had his portrait on the cover, on railway bookstalls, with an inviting legend—"Please take one"—inscribed above them. People always took what they could get for nothing, and he stared righteously at thousands of idle readers from the shining front page. Caution attacked him like winter frost, and, before he got in, he decided to write to Monica and tell her that, for a time, they must not meet. As for the trip to Swanage, it was out of the question.

All this had nothing to say directly to what Monica had told him, but the reaction was clear in its source, and he began to think of Cathy and Doctor Chapman. Perhaps, after all, it would be better to go to Welldon Grange and see her. He could tell her that he had always known that there was nothing wrong, but that he had been helpless. He was wondering now whether it might not be better to change his whole attitude, go down to the asylum, and prevail upon Cathy to forgive him, the innocent party to the fact, and bring her back to Kingslade. That would be a facer for the Carstairs' clique, and it would be a thoroughly good score. Monica had "let him down," out of her own mouth she had condemned herself, and she had never before told him or as much as hinted at the ugly story of Cathy beating upon the locked door. God! what a world it was.

He turned into St. James's Court and went up to his flat, where Perrin was still up and waiting for him. There was a telegram on the table, and his valet informed him that he had been rung up by a gentleman who would not leave any message, and shortly afterwards the telegram had come.

He took the yellow envelope between his fingers. It was bulky, and the message it contained must be a long one. As he did so he looked at the flap, and then at Perrin's narrow, sharp-featured face. Lorrimer paused for a second. The flap had been tampered with, and he was suddenly angry with a burst of passionate resentment.

"You have opened this," he said, as the envelope yawned unresisting in his hands. "Don't deny it."

Perrin did deny it. He was outraged by the suggestion, for he had his own personal pride, and Lorrimer's statement was followed by a sharp altercation, which ended in Perrin's leaving the room far from mollified by a belated retraction on the part of his master, who had remembered suddenly that he could not dismiss his servant.

The telegram was from Doctor Chapman, and told him that Lady Lorrimer had disappeared. He asked Sir John to come at once, as there was no time to be lost, and added that Mrs. Hinton had gone away with his wife.

Lorrimer sat down at the table and tried to think. He was too late now, and the Carstairs' gang had outmanœuvred him. They had acted at once, and Cathy was free, free to tell the whole of her world that her husband had connived at a sordid plan to shut her up eternally in the doomed seclusion of a madhouse. He was innocent; that was the main thing, and, if it became necessary, Monica must give her testimony to the fact. She had kept him in ignorance, and had used her own medical knowledge to blind his better judgment. As well as that—he harked back again—had not Doctor Chapman reported his wife dangerously mad?

Cathy was out of the place, liberated by the woman who had shown the sense to cut loose from Amyas; and to take any definite steps would mean fierce collision with Cathy's allies. The idea of it made no appeal to Lorrimer. If he acted it would bring about conflict. Suppose he let the matter drop? If he told Doctor Chapman that he, personally, declined action, Cathy would be unmolested and, possibly, grateful. To clear himself with her, and prevent her from saying anything, Monica must be got to make a statement. She had been ready enough to tell him, and if she was so conscientious, she might well tell Cathy. He knew very well that Cathy was incapable of rancour or revenge, whatever the rest of them might feel, and she represented his one hope for peace. Monica put the onus of her own act upon him, saying that it had arisen out of her love of him, and that was an admission she must not make public, even if she wished to. On every side he was hemmed in and helpless. He swore under his breath, and, taking a sheet of paper, wrote in his large, scrawling hand that he would not go to Welldon Grange, and that he would be obliged to Doctor Chapman if he took no steps at all. One great advantage about refusing to take any steps would be, that he could never be obliged to retrace them.

Having disposed of Doctor Chapman he had to consider what he meant to say to Monica. He began the letter with a term of endearment which mocked him as he wrote it. He said he had been thinking things over, and that he had come to the conclusion that they must part for a time. Cathy was free, freed by Lilian Hinton, and he did not know where she was, nor how circumstances were likely to shape. He had not been responsible for her incarceration at the Grange, and he put it to Monica that, as Cathy was at liberty, she should admit that she herself had acted without full consideration. "You were plain enough with me to-night," he wrote, "but that is no use, nor is your reason—the one you gave me—one which you can safely refer to; but in justice to Cathy, now that there is likely to be too much talk, can't you explain that you acted too precipitately, and that you must see her, and reconsider your former conclusion as to the state of her health?"

He ended by saying that he was her "loving Jack," and he posted the letter himself before he went to bed. Monica would get it in the morning, and so be able to act before much harm had been done.

Lorrimer slept very little that night, and he knew that he must placate Perrin before he left the house, but Perrin did not appear, and the housemaid looked after him at breakfast; a skittish girl with large eyes, who had amused him more than once when he was in a gala mood. He was in no gala mood as he drank his coffee, and the absence of Perrin was depressing.

The need for action was upon him, and very soon he went out. Cathy was probably with Lady Carstairs, and the right thing to do was to present himself there without delay. He could tell Cathy's aunt how he had heard the news with intense relief. He could tell her, quietly and without any hesitation, that Monica had admitted to him that her own decision now appeared doubtful to her, and he would urge Lady Carstairs to see Monica herself. It did not seem to him that this was in any sense a betrayal of Monica, and it was no use her trying to push him under the yoke of full responsibility.

When he came to the steps of Lady Carstairs' house he had prepared his speech, and when the butler, who looked at him with surprise, said that he was not sure whether her Ladyship was disengaged or not, and left him in the big drawing-room, Lorrimer was quite composed and even cheerful.

After a few minutes the manservant reappeared, and asked whether Sir John could send a message as Lady Carstairs was unable to see him. It was a rebuff, but he had expected it, and he wrote on a card, "In connection with C. Very urgent," and sat down again to wait. He was quite sure that Aunt Amy would never refuse that bait.

Nor did she, for she came into the room soon afterwards, and, though her manner was icily stiff, he had forced the position.

"Yes?" Lady Carstairs said, and she did not sit down.

"Is Cathy here?" he asked, and his voice shook in spite of himself.

"Here? What do you mean? You know where she is."

"Lady Carstairs, you misunderstand the situation," he said, dropping his gloves and then stooping to pick them up. "Only last night I was informed of a fact which has driven me nearly off my head."

Lady Carstairs showed no concern. She was waiting with the courteous patience of the generation to which she belonged, and he was trying her considerably.

"Two facts, I should say. Though, coming in the order in which they did, I was relieved beyond speech to hear that Mrs. Hinton had taken Cathy away from Welldon Grange."

"The asylum," Lady Carstairs' voice faltered in spite of herself. "Lilian has helped Cathy to escape?" The news was so sudden and so grateful to Aunt Amy that she felt her knees give, and she sat down, her eyes still upon Lorrimer.

"Give me this chance," he said appealingly; "I had it last night from Doctor Henstock that she had doubts all the time as to the reality of Cathy's—er—attack. It was cruelly unfair to me, and I am placed in a position——"

"Unfair to *you?*" Lady Carstairs was rigid. "What right had your friend, Doctor Henstock, to find out at this hour, that she had made an irreparable mistake?"

"Will you see her, and let her tell you herself?"

Lady Carstairs considered for a moment.

"I refuse to see her. She has behaved shamefully. Now you are telling me—are you not?" she looked a little vague, "that you are wronged in some way." She got up again and rang the bell. "No doubt you will find those who will listen to you, but, speaking for myself, your part is already quite clear. I have nothing more to say, except that I am grateful for the news of Cathy's release. She is not here, nor do I know where she is."

Lorrimer was dumbfounded. Lady Carstairs was having him shown out, and he had been able to say none of the things which he wished to say to her. She was hopelessly prejudiced, and apparently cared nothing that he had been let down by Monica Henstock.

He had no special purpose before him when he left the house, and he walked into the park and sat down on a chair under a tree. If people will not listen to your reasons it is waste of time to talk to them, and his thoughts wandered to Monica. It was certainly hard upon her now, horribly hard. Why did things turn out so damnably? Yet he felt sure that she would clear him, she was very honest, and she had never lied to man or woman. His sense of discomfort deepened, and he wondered where Cathy really was. Where had they taken her, and was she well or ill? He had heard stories of asylums which came back to him now, though he could not believe that moderately sane people were herded in with raving lunatics. The idea was tormenting, and he got up from his chair, and walked to his club, where he ordered himself a stiff drink.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE drive down the wide avenue, the pause at the gates, and the moment when the car sailed quietly clear of Welldon Grange, were moments of sheer bliss to Lilian Hinton. The chauffeur had orders to take them to the hotel, and there Lilian and Cathy got out. The car was then closed, and was driven slowly back past the gates, and in a circuitous route around the confluent roads, and, before lunch time, the chauffeur delivered a note from Mrs. Hinton, saying that she had kept Cathy to lunch in a village some miles away, and might not return at the expected time. She also said that Cathy was enjoying the change immensely, and that there was no need for anxiety.

Meantime, Cathy, Lilian and Robert were tearing at top-speed along by-roads and unfrequented ways, and the distance grew with each minute.

Cathy had been startled at first, and had shown signs of nervousness when they arrived at the hotel. She was so glad to see Robert again that the unexpectedness of it all made her forget herself, and when he told her that he had a picnic-basket in his car, and that he intended to race her and Lilian miles away, she was like an excited and happy child at the prospect. She and Lilian sat in the back of the car and Robert drove. His chauffeur was not with them, so that there was all the blessedness of absolute intimacy around her.

"I haven't driven in a car, since . . . that time," she said, and Lilian slipped her arm inside that of her friend. "I thought I was going back to Aunt Amy."

Lilian squeezed her arm affectionately.

"Does it upset you to talk of it now?" she asked; "if it does, Cathy, don't think about it. When a thing is over, it is done with."

"Ah, but it isn't over," Cathy's face grew shadowed; "I have to go back." She breathed quickly. "Lil, I felt frightened to leave, but now I am frightened to return. You see what a pulp my nerves are in."

Lilian could feel that she was beginning to tremble, and she put her hands over Cathy's firmly.

"You are never going back," she said; "Robert and I are taking you away for good."

Cathy's body grew suddenly limp, and she leaned back. It was as though a stone had been rolled away from the door of her living grave, and it took time to realise what was happening. Lilian watched her with alarm; she was as white as a ghost. Perhaps she had been precipitate, and she watched the colour return slowly to Cathy's pale cheeks.

"Do you believe that I am not mad?" she asked eagerly. "Lil, do you *really* believe that?"

"I don't believe you ever tried to kill yourself," Lilian said.

"I was very ill after a time I had in the padded cell. . . ." she wavered, and hid her face on Lilian's shoulder. "After that, I thought they might be right. Aggy believed it, and Doctor Bracy. You see, darling," she explained, "in an asylum, if you are quick and excitable, as I always am, it damns you, possibly even more than if you are quiet—that is, 'morbid.' *Everything* is a sign of insanity, and I used to wonder if I was developing tricks or habits. The faintest twitching of a muscle, or some way of jigging your foot if you sit with your knees crossed. Lots of men back from France couldn't keep their feet still, I had noticed that, and you see these things growing day by day on people who have weak nerves. I start now, like a criminal, if I hear a door bang, but I don't wink, or tug at my ears, or bite my nails."

"Don't, Cathy, don't," Lilian said in a stifled voice. "You never were mad, and you aren't mad now. Don't talk of it."

Cathy looked down at their locked hands.

"They had me put there on purpose?"

"They had," Lilian's voice was low and intense. She could never bring herself to think of Lorrimer or Monica without a sick feeling of physical repulsion.

For a long time Cathy said nothing. Just then she wanted to look neither forward nor back, but to give herself up to the wonder of the swift motion, the free, glad sunlight, and the knowledge that she was not ever to return. It was like the passing out of a life of continuous pain into a region of the blessed, where nothing need be said, but the slow, healing waves of peace might lap her weary soul; and then, quite suddenly, she slept, and dreamed of wide waters and quiet gardens where everything was well with her again.

She was awakened by the car coming to a standstill in a bowery green lane, where Robert got out and found a fallen tree where they could sit and eat their luncheon. Cathy felt as though she was only half conscious of what was happening. She sat on the ivy-grown tree and Robert and Lilian looked after her, though neither of them talked much, and Cathy looked around her every few minutes and seemed to be telling herself that she was free. But before the basket was packed, another mood had come upon her, and she began to grow nervous.

"Robert, we ought not to have stopped," she said; "what if they send after me? If they were to bring me back now," she rose to her feet in wild alarm. "Let us hurry, Lil, oh, my dear, let us hurry. I feel as though they might be close to us somewhere."

Lilian comforted her, and again the car started.

"Are we going to London?" Cathy asked anxiously; "I don't think I should feel safe there. Monica is in London, and she and he will hunt me, if I am there. Lil, Lil, hide me in a place they won't think of. I *can't* go back, and I can't see Monica or Jack." Tears were streaming down her face as she spoke. "Don't let them find me again."

"We are going over to Ireland," Lilian said, quieting her with her cool, steady hands, "to Parteen, which belongs to Robert. It is miles from everywhere, and Batkins is there."

"They might have let me go to Aunt Amy," Cathy's eyes were pathetic in their misery. "I had a bad row with Jack.

Did you know that? I said I would go away, and if we separated I would not ever say anything . . . but I suppose they wanted freedom."

Lilian made an inarticulate sound of disgust.

"I don't understand even now," Cathy went on. "After all, Lil, I was clearing out, and that gave them almost as much as they could hope to have, even with me in an asylum."

"I can't talk of them," Lilian said again; "I suppose they weighed the pros and cons, and there was Sir John's great career. Rather unfortunately, from his point of view, he is now mixed up with the Church and State people. The hypocrites who have to be careful about the outside of the cup and platter, and so on."

"Are they together? I mean openly?" Cathy asked.

"Openly? When was there anything open about either of them? Not likely. They take great care of that."

"And Hammersly? Is he still in power? He and Muggins were tremendously friendly."

"So I imagined, but I know nothing of the man, except that he got a job which Anthony told me he had not the smallest claim to have. The price of his dirty work, I expect, for Lorrimer was credited with having done the wire pulling."

"They seem all of them a long way off, now," Cathy said, resting her head on the cushions of the car. "I wish I weren't in their way, Lil, it seems stupid, doesn't it? To me they are all part of a ghastly dream which just now I know to be a dream, but I also know that there must be times when it will grow real; and I shall need all the help I can get."

"You will never need anything which we shall not give you," Lilian said, smiling at her; "rest your mind on that thought, Cath."

The night mail thundered and swept on its way to Anglesey, taking the three fugitives through the dark, sleeping country. The mail steamer, with the lights shining in the rigging and making clear, yellow avenues from the port holes, was waiting to take them out to face the stiff seas outside the harbour. It seemed to Cathy that, until she felt the motion of the ship and heard the hoarse, long-drawn hoot of departure, she had not even begun to recognise herself as a free agent. She would not go down to her cabin, but sat on deck with Robert, wrapped in a thick coat of his which he had brought for her, the wind stinging her face, and the waves racing under the broken reflections of a high-riding moon.

Life was being poured back into her veins, and at times the joy she experienced hurt like pain, it was so overwhelming, and she could not restrain her tears.

"Don't cry, Cathy, don't cry," Amyas said, and he patted her arm. "It's all over now."

"Don't you know that I'm crying for joy?" she said, and he watched her smile at him, the moonlight lighting her face. "It's awfully unusual to cry for joy, Robert, but then everything is unusual, and it fits in with the rest. I thought I was never going to be happy again, and now I am so happy that I feel as if really and truly I might go mad at last."

"Don't ever say that word again," he said. "How do you think Lilian is? It's funny that she and I should be running away together with the full consent of Hinton."

"And I am here, as chaperon," Cathy added.

"I hadn't thought of you like that," he said. "You're not demure enough, Cathy," he pulled himself up short. "You know I've missed you a great deal."

"And I, haven't I missed you?" she said. "You know I have. Let us try and quarrel a little, for the sake of old times."

She looked so worn and so tragic, as she turned in her old, wilful way to him, that Amyas could hardly bear the sense of contrast which the recollection brought with it.

"I'll quarrel as much as you like, when you are fit again," he said, and Cathy put a cold hand from under the coat, and let it lie in his.

"Robert, are you *you?*" she asked him.

Why, oh why did she look so fragile, so visionary, so much as though only a hand's span divided her from the silence beyond this world, as impenetrable as a hundred stone walls? He was torn with a new fear. Cathy might leave them now, and go away to the "Perhaps" or the "Forever," or whatever name you chose to give the place which can only be imagined. "I'm rather like the Happy Hypocrite," he said. "I put on a mask to improve my appearance, by now I may really be quite decent looking."

Cathy smiled. "You are still *mon ami Pierrot.*"

She said nothing for a time, and then she spoke again.

"I have reckoned up my own futility," she said at last. "I fell in love with an imaginary clean sweep, and sweeps can't ever be clean, any kind of sweep."

"Sweeps are usually pretty sweepish all through," Amyas agreed. "Don't worry about them, Cath. You're on your way to Ireland where no one bothers about such things. We will light our fires in the open, if you like it best, and have no chimneys."

She was very tired now, and he settled her cushions for her and sat by her as she lay back with closed eyes.

"Do you remember how I once found you asleep on the sofa?" she asked, raising her lids. "I told you that, if you knew that you snored, you wouldn't take those beastly things."

"I gave them up after that," he was pleased to tell her this. "I couldn't go on snoring on people's sofas. Vanity is a much safer thing to appeal to than virtue."

Her eyes closed again. "If I snore, don't wake me," she said, "but my nose isn't that shape. That is one of the advantages of having my kind of nose."

"Hush-a-bye, baby," Robert said, in his drawling, sophisticated voice, which always suggested mountains of money and endless leisure. But his eyes felt hot and strained, and they filled with tears.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Robert crossed back to England the following night, leaving Lilian and Miss Batten in charge of Cathy. She was suffering from reaction, and he was still dreadfully anxious about her, but he believed in the healing process which lay in the quiet of Parteen. The mountains, the heather-clothed uplands and the silence, combined with the flowing of quiet waters, all made for untold peace.

It was going to take a long time for Cathy to arrive at recovery, and the awful horror of her experience would fade out very slowly, until the active torture of her memories grew dim and the pain of her recollections waned into forgetfulness. He had been very reluctant to leave, but he decided that he must go to London. Lady Carstairs had to be told, and Lilian could not remain long away. Aunt Amy was to be summoned with a capable nurse who wore no uniform, and Cathy could gradually be brought back to life. Her vitality had failed suddenly, and he left her lying in her bed, close to the open window which faced the ravine below the house. Parteen had melancholy moods when giant mists came down the mountains and folded the miles of black fir-trees and tangle of rhododendrons in a thick, damp veil, but even then it was a place of peace, and Amyas was glad that Cathy should first see it under a shining sky. A wind, as soft as silk, "Shelley's West Wind" Cathy called it, was coming through the open window. She had only spoken very little.

"There are other flowers growing in the grasses and the heather besides those we can see," she said; "little flowers of hope, Robert, and when I am stronger I can go out and pick some of them to keep always."

"Will you give me one when you do?" he asked her slowly.

"Yes, I will," she smiled her flitting, ghostly little smile.

"Take care of her, Lilian," he said, as he stood ready to depart. "I'm so dreadfully anxious all the time."

Lilian squeezed his hand hard. "It has made you different."

"She won't ever care," he said, rocking a little on his long legs, with his old indifferent manner.

"I don't know," Lilian's eyes grew speculative.

"I'm not really thinking of myself," he said, half apologetically. "Nothing matters, except that she should get well. By the way, I intend to settle my account with Lorrimer."

"She must get rid of him," Lilian said emphatically. "Go to him and force him to tell the truth. Don't spare them, Robert, for my sake, even; let it be fire and slaughter."

He drove away on a ramshackle side-car down the deep sandy avenue which wound up and down hill through two miles of wild demesne, the brown trout stream bearing him company along the left bank. The rhododendrons were in full flower, and ranged from the palest pink to soft rose-crimson, and from royal purple to the sad, soft colour of palest mauve. Cathy would live on the feast of colour, and the place was gorgeously wild. No smooth lawns, no trimmed hedges to recall the asylum grounds. God had planted Parteen, much as He might have planted the original Eden, and man had done nothing to spoil it. The larches and firs, the birches and the stunted oaks, were the home of innumerable wild birds, and beyond and over all, the Slieve Na Mon mountains guarded the secret place like a great wall; blue, grey and purple, they brooded over the place below.

From the last turn in the long avenue Amyas looked back to the white house on the distant plateau, and raised his hat in salute. Cathy was safe there, he thanked God for that, and as Amyas had only rarely thanked God for anything, it may have been that his gratitude was noted in some spiritual sphere.

He travelled up to Dublin and caught the night mail to Holyhead, and the early morning found him in the noise and confusion of London again. When he had slept for an hour and finished his breakfast, he went at once to see Lady Carstairs, and told her the incidents of the escape.

"Sir John Lorrimer has been here," she said, when he had finished. "I saw him, because he sent me a message to say that his business was urgent and concerned Cathy. He actually dared to imply that he had been wronged and deceived."

Lady Carstairs looked very majestic and angry as she spoke.

"Who by?" Amyas asked. "Whom does he accuse of his own sins? I did not expect he would admit to them, Aunt Amy, but it is quite interesting to hear who is held responsible."

"Monica Henstock," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders. "He actually suggested that I should see the woman myself."

Amyas whistled under his breath. "So he wants to do her in now, does he?"

Amyas got up and walked to the window, thinking carefully.

"On the whole," Amyas said, coming back to his chair, "I think that I had better see Doctor Henstock. Whatever she may have to say, it ought to be enlightening."

"Robert, one question," Lady Carstairs hesitated painfully, "*Is* her mind affected? After such a terrible time this might so easily have happened, for darling Cathy was always a little different to most people."

He lowered his eyes. "It has marked her for life. She won't ever be as she once was, and only we who knew her before will see the old Cathy again."

Lady Carstairs, stern disciplinarian of the old régime, covered her face with her hands and cried.

"My poor child, my poor, poor Cathy," she said.

"She will always be the same to us," he said in a low voice, and Aunt Amy looked up, recovering herself.

"You are a good man, Robert," she said, "though I had not thought it. I must be honest, and though I always *liked* you very much, I never admired your qualities. Will you forgive me?"

"I can forgive you," he said with a smile of amusement.

"Cathy who wanted to reform the whole world," Lady Carstairs said sadly. "Ah, dear me."

"Well, she has reformed me, I suppose. That wasn't altogether easy, but it may encourage her, when she is well enough to want to begin all over again."

He left her after a little more talk of plans and went straight to the house of Monica Henstock, with its demure door and well-polished brass. Doctor Henstock was interviewing a patient, and Amyas had to wait in a room off the hall, where he turned the pages of various journals and tried not to watch the clock all the time.

At length Miss Batten's successor came, and told him that Doctor Henstock could give him five minutes, and he found her with her watch on the table, and the expression of her face anything but encouraging.

She seemed immensely surprised that he had come to her, and asked him to sit down in a chair facing the window.

"Don't trouble to look for symptoms," he said easily, "I am not ill, Doctor Henstock. I came here to ask you a few questions."

Monica took off her glasses. Of late her sight had begun to trouble her a little and she was wearing pince-nez.

"What is it that you want to know?" she said, and Robert, for all his anger, felt a touch of pity. Monica was withering rather than fading, and she looked as though she had troubles of her own.

"It appears," he said, and he spoke without rancour, "that Sir John Lorrimer visited Lady Carstairs and referred her to you for full information about Miss Rossiter. Were you certain when you, rather precipitately, shut her up in an asylum?" He began to hate her again suddenly.

His words took immediate effect, and Monica flushed, and began to touch the boxes and notebooks on her table nervously.

"I certified Cathy with great reluctance," she said. "You will believe that, Mr. Amyas?"

"I will try to believe it."

"In cases of the kind, it is often a very urgent matter. If one waits for further corroboration it may mean disaster to the patient——"

Amyas interrupted her very politely. "Did you definitely believe Miss Rossiter to be mad?"

"There were times when I *was* convinced," Monica said, and her voice sounded tired and exhausted. "But the pain it all cost me has frequently dragged me back and back over the events previous to Cathy's certification. I am only human, and I loved her devotedly."

Her manner was so sincere that Amyas stared at her in wonder. Had the woman allowed herself to be deceived, and was she really speaking quite frankly?

"Did your love for her take any practical form?" he asked, angry with himself for the touch of pity he had felt. "Did you, for instance, go to the asylum and see her there?"

Monica shook her head silently.

"Miss Rossiter is free again, and her friends are anxious to clear her finally and fully from the accusation of insanity." He drew his chair closer to the table, and, as she did not reply, he went on. "If you and the wretched creature, Luke, who was your accomplice will make an honest statement that you both admit you were wrong, and that the facts with which you furnished the asylum doctors were a fabrication, I fully believe that they will see that their own error arose from your mis-statement. You cannot give her back her health or happiness, you can never undo the ghastly wrong you have done to her, but at least that very small amount of reparation lies in your power."

Monica was ashy white, and all her self-assurance had vanished suddenly. She seemed to be driven by many thoughts the trend of which Amyas could not guess.

"You ask me to—what was it?" she faltered.

"To make what reparation lies in your power, and to get Doctor Chapman to rescind his own judgment," Robert said fiercely. "Whether she will ever recover her health, God knows. In any case," he went on more quietly, "Sir John Lorrimer is anxious to be cleared, if that is an added argument. He has told Lady Carstairs that you misled him."

"Not that, not that," Monica's voice broke out like a cry into the room; it was as though some intolerable weight had been added to the burden she carried.

"Yes, he has," Amyas repeated the words. "If you are not prepared to act honestly for her sake, you may see your way to doing what he wishes."

Monica got up, and, pressing her hands over her eyes, walked blindly to the fire-place and stood with her back to Amyas. After a time she spoke, and her voice was tremulous and overcharged with strong feeling.

"I am not being fairly treated," she said. "What I said to Sir John was spoken under a sense of great trouble of mind. My mind has been very much troubled about it all. . . ."

"So I should suppose," Amyas replied.

"If, however, it will be of advantage to Cathy, I will do what you wish. I will make a report for the asylum doctors and they must decide for themselves. Also, I should like to say that Sir John is quite clear. He had to act upon the advice I gave him. There is no blame whatever attached to him."

Amyas looked at her back, and saw that her bowed shoulders heaved slightly.

"There is nothing I can say," he said as he got up and prepared to leave, "except that I pity anyone who puts an ounce of trust in Colonel Lorrimer's good faith."

She made no effort to reply, and she did not speak to him again as he left. What a queer mixture she was, he thought. She had admitted to having acted without telling Lorrimer, and she persuaded him that his wife was mad. It was a cynical business at best, but she and Lorrimer should eat their lies, every damned one of them. Until he had seen Lorrimer, he felt that no real rest lay anywhere, and he went back to his rooms again, intending to choose the same hour as that of his last visit, in the hope of catching the Member for Kingslade before he had gone out; and it was with some surprise that he found a man waiting to see him, who informed him that he was Sir John Lorrimer's valet, and that he had something important to say.

"Well, say it to someone else," he said rudely; "I don't want you here."

The man did not stir. "It will be worth your while," he said stoically.

Amyas wavered, and flung open the door of his room. "Go in," he said; "you're for auction, I suppose?"

"Precisely, sir," the man replied respectfully.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Robert Amyas stood before the door of Lorrimer's flat, and was admitted by a hesitating maidservant. Sir John was in, she said, and had not gone to bed, but she was not sure if he wished to receive visitors. Amyas assured her that she need not make further inquiries, as Sir John expected him, and he walked in and put down his hat on a carved rug box near the door. The girl, evidently a new hand at admitting guests, had forgotten to ask Amyas his name, and showed him silently to the smoking-room, where Lorrimer was sitting at a roll-topped desk writing letters.

He looked round in surprise, and when he saw who his visitor was he immediately became hostile. There was discomposure behind the heavy face and the large majesty of Sir John's demeanour, and he only made a vague attempt to rise as he recognised his guest.

"You choose strange hours for your visits," he said, remembering carefully that he was in the right, and that there was nothing against him. "Anything I can do for you?"

The question pleased him as he asked it. It reduced Amyas to the position of a suitor who comes to ask for favours, and Lorrimer felt that he had begun well.

"If you like to put it that way," Robert replied. "I don't particularly want to sit down, but, as there is a good deal to say, it may be as well."

He pulled up a chair as he spoke. Lorrimer was going to try bullying methods, that was perfectly clear, and Amyas decided not to give him a start.

"This morning," he continued, "I went to see Doctor Henstock."

"Oh?" Lorrimer's tone was guarded. They had done as he wished, eventually, and he was not displeased. It was a great consolation at that moment to feel so sure of Monica's integrity.

"She cleared you of all complicity in the matter of Miss Rossiter's fraudulent certification," Robert said quite amiably. "In fact she agrees to take the onus upon her own shoulders. Doctor Luke is expected in Liverpool next week, and we are arranging now for a special inquiry into Miss Rossiter's case. The result will be that she will be cleared of the accusation made against her sanity. You realise, of course, that this ruins Doctor Henstock professionally?"

Lorrimer did not relish the information, but his attitude remained self-possessed.

"I am very anxious that my wife should be cleared," he said ponderously. "It is a most important point. You say that you have arranged for a special inquiry. I am much obliged. I will approach the Commissioners at once."

"I think not," Robert's voice was intensely quiet. "It will be done without reference to you."

The sense of something behind Robert's words struck Lorrimer very unpleasantly, but he spoke without heat.

"I can't allow that, Amyas; I admit that the conditions are difficult. For instance, I am at present ignorant of where my wife actually is. When I discover this, I shall go to her."

"I think not," Amyas said again.

"It hardly matters what you think," Lorrimer's tones grew angry. "When my wife realises that the whole thing was a monstrous mistake, and that I was in no way party to the error, she will not thank you for your present attitude."

"You are satisfied that Doctor Henstock should be held entirely responsible?"

"Certainly," Lorrimer became aggrieved; "I don't see how it can be otherwise. She took that responsibility when she led me to believe Cathy was mad."

Amyas drew a deep breath, and looked round the room as though it suffocated him. The natural stolidity and obtuseness of Lorrimer was helping him, but Robert promised himself that he would make him change his front before he had done.

"You have no protective feeling towards Doctor Henstock?" he asked. "No desire at all to shelter her in any way from the racket?"

"My good fellow," Lorrimer said irritably, "what are you driving at? Doctor Henstock was Cathy's medical adviser, and I was at the mercy of her judgments. You speak as though I put up a job. There was no job about it. Miss Henstock acted precipitately. Anyhow, *I* am, after my wife, the most injured person. How would you like to be in my place?"

"I should hate it," Amyas agreed almost cordially. "I only asked these questions so that I should know how far you were disposed to sacrifice Doctor Henstock so that you might escape your share of blame."

Lorrimer hummed, and moved in his chair. It would be almost worth it to kick Amyas out.

"Blame, sacrifice? What are you talking of?" he said. "I don't understand a word of it. My wife is now at liberty, thanks to Mrs. Hinton," he gave a sideways smile that he felt would draw Amyas; "probably in a few weeks she will be back at Kingslade. No one knows where she has been, and, though I quite agree to the inquiry, it seems unnecessary in a way. Of course it will be private? If so, how does Doctor Henstock suffer? Who is to know?"

"People have a way of finding things out," Amyas replied, and he got up, his thin, dark face alight with feeling and his bored manner entirely in abeyance for the moment. "As for Miss Rossiter's return to Kingslade, she will never do that. You nearly killed her." He put his hands on the table and leaned forward. "You will have your freedom in any case."

Sir John Lorrimer's hands grew cold and damp, and he felt for his pocket-handkerchief. Alarms were awake in him.

"What are you talking of?" he demanded, and Amyas looked at him with limitless scorn in his eyes.

"It hardly seems worth while my telling you what I think of you," he said; "you will get all you need of public abuse presently, except that your worst crime can, for obvious reasons, not be made known." He watched Lorrimer rise heavily to his feet. "Perhaps, even after the divorce, Doctor Henstock will still care to marry you. She sold her friend, so it isn't easy for me to judge."

"After the divorce? Look here, Amyas, someone has been libelling me. I must have this out."

"No one has been libelling you. I have the facts quite definitely. Your own people will advise you, I suppose. If you defend the action, so much the more for the Sunday papers to report upon."

"It's a lie," Lorrimer shouted, "a damned lie," and Amyas turned to the door and opened it.

"I always knew you were a swine," he said, "always. I don't think you are any more of one than I fully expected you to be," and he left Lorrimer alone with his thoughts.

Stupid, blind and cowardly, he had thrown away everything, and for what? He had no luck. Plenty of men lived lives beside which his relations with Monica had been almost ideal, and they never got caught out. Hammersly had once said to him that he was running into danger—that was before the break—and that it was a bad mistake of judgment to have such a connection with a woman in his own class. "If it ever does come to light, it's taken seriously," he had said; "with the others, no one gives it a thought."

And Monica, what would she think? Their united publicity was going to send the whole structure of his career to the ground. He wondered if he had the courage to face it. Any love he had felt for Monica was lost in the whirlwind of dismay. Cathy had been his, Cathy with her rainbow of mystery; he felt now that he had loved her with the one real love of his life, and he had been fooled by Monica, who had played her hand with the recklessness of passion. God! what a business, what a hopeless, murky business! He grew more and more sorry for himself. Was he to be tied for life to Monica Henstock, a bitter, disappointed woman, whose career had meant as much to her as his own had ever meant to him. Monica would marry him, she had meant to do that always. Now she would be able to do it, and he supposed that he should have to "do the right thing." They could hate each other into old age, and throw mutual recriminations at one another across the dreadful gulf which separated them.

Perrin was the offender, of course. Perrin had heard him and Amyas quarrelling, and had known where to carry his dirty wares. Lorrimer sat down and put his hands over his face, and never, in his bitter hour, did he think either of Cathy's sufferings, nor of what his own conduct must look like in the eyes of Monica Henstock; Monica, who had once been honest.

At length he went to the telephone. Monica had a telephone beside her bed, so that she could be called up at any hour, as she frequently was, and he began to speak. He told her that Amyas had been there, and he heard her voice, strained and wretched, saying that she had done all she could.

"I took all the blame. That was what you wanted me to do, wasn't it?"

"They are arranging an inquiry, and all the evidence will be gone into," he said. "But what really matters is that they have found out."

In his mind he pictured Monica sitting up in her bed, the receiver in her hands, and her eyes wild and staring. She did not answer at once, and he spoke again. "I tell you, it's known now. Perrin has given the whole show away."

"Jack! It must be stopped. For your sake most of all, but for mine also. I can't stand a case of the kind. It must be stopped."

What a fool she was, bleating like a sheep that "it must be stopped," and talking of herself—of course—and her twopenny-halfpenny career as a doctor.

"I shall be ruined," he said tersely. "If you hadn't let me down over Cathy this need not have been. It's pretty stiff, but it's going to come off. All the Carstairs gang are in full cry."

"Jack," her tones were pleading, as though she begged of him to leave her at least one illusion.

"I am going to Paris to-morrow," he said, "and after that I shall not see you until it is over. What's the use? . . . I'm going to do the right thing, so don't get hysterical." He listened, but no reply came. "I shall put you right," he said again, in the same savage voice, and again he listened, but there was complete silence. Monica had rung off! He put down the receiver roughly. She hadn't even an ounce of gratitude, and, instead of saying that she felt he was behaving well, she was entirely silent.

CHAPTER XXXV

Two years had made their slow circle of the seasons, and Cathy had returned to life again. She bore about her the faint traces of long suffering now past, and, though the shadow lay behind her, she was still close enough to it to have lost the wild freshness of the old years. In the spring, following upon her release, she had been well enough to be brought to London, and had been eager to get the divorce proceedings against her husband carried through. If Jack and Monica could be happy together, so much the better, and she did not wish to stand between them for one unnecessary hour. She had taken the whole thing very quietly; the quality of mercy was never strained in Cathy's nature. The day when the case was heard had been trying, and though she only had to appear in the witness-box for a few minutes, so that the hotel proprietor of the "Travellers' Rest" might swear that she was not the lady described in his books as Lorrimer's wife, it had been a severe strain upon her shaken nerves and health, and for some time after she had been very ill. The inquiry into her own case had been carried through successfully, and thus, late in the day, the stigma was removed.

In the end, Monica Henstock had been held gravely responsible, and, even before the divorce case had made the world agog with talk, she was virtually discredited, and rumours got about which left her with a choice to resign her official appointments, or be required to tender her resignation.

Of all this Cathy knew very little. She had an invincible sense of pity for everyone, and she believed that she was making Jack and Monica happy at last.

She was back in the house in Cavendish Square, during the winter, and her old life re-formed around her quietly.

Twyford was back again, and his plans for the School of Forestry had materialised; he was going to be married, at last, and he came to tell Cathy.

"It isn't that I can change to you," he said. "I'm not likely to change, nor is it that I do not love her, I shouldn't have asked her to be my wife otherwise, but there must be different degrees of love, I suppose," and Cathy sat resting her hands in his, intensely happy because, at last, he was content.

"You are the best friend who ever lived," she said, "and I hope that she will make you go to a decent tailor."

"And what about yourself?" he retorted. "You are as untidy as ever, Cathy, and I'm sure you are pinned together."

The poor, faded old jokes were dreadfully dear in their way to both of them.

Robert Amyas, alone, was incomprehensible to Cathy. He hardly ever came to see her, and, when the papers got hold of the fact that Sir John Lorrimer, late Member for Kingslade, had been married to Doctor Monica Henstock, Amyas went to Italy, and never so much as wrote Cathy a line. His silence hurt her, and she missed him more and more as the days went by.

She had loved Parteen, as a soul newly released out of anguish may love heaven, and she wished to go back there again, but, with Robert away and enveloped in silence, how was she to go? Cathy wondered whether he still cared for Lilian, with a touch of romantic, self-sacrificing fidelity; it would be like Robert, if he did.

In the May following upon Lorrimer's marriage, Cathy was well again, and she received a letter from Robert, suggesting that she, Lady Carstairs, Miss Batten and he should all picnic for a month at Parteen. Cathy was gay at the thought, and Lady Carstairs consented, though she detested the journey and hated the country, but she seemed anxious to go, and she kissed Cathy with a touch of emotion.

Parteen was awakening to the glory of the full spring, and the trees were fluttering tiny banners of the tenderest green. The white rhododendrons were in flower, and the mountains stood strong and encircling around the little world of peace.

Cathy, her aunt, and the faithful Batkins arrived a week before the coming of Amyas, and the day he was expected he found Cathy in the avenue, sitting on a low stone bridge which spanned the racing brown waters below. Her hands were full of wild flowers, and she wore no hat; directly he saw her, he got off the car and sent it onwards to the house.

"Well, Cathy," he said. "Well?" and he held her hands, looking at her raised face, and as he could not think of anything else to say, he said "Well" again.

"How many wells make a river?" she asked, laughing at him. "Did you ever hear that before, Robert? I'm well, and you're well, and everything's well, isn't it?" She glanced at the glory that surrounded them on every side.

"It's very odd that I cannot think of anything else to say," he remarked, as he sat down beside her. "But I can't. Shall I begin all over again? Well, Cathy?"

"Oh, stop talking about wells," she said. "What do you mean by having gone away for a year and only remembered me at Christmas? I don't like to be remembered only once in twelve months."

"I thought it best," he said slowly, looking at the primrose silk of his socks. "Do you like my socks, Cathy?"

"*Stop* making conversation," she said again. "You've been away a year, and, during that year, we have both been growing 'a day older and a day worse,' as Norrie Barry at the lodge says. Three hundred and sixty-five times older and worse, Robert, and you come back and ask me if I like the colour of your socks. I don't like it, I think they are hopelessly vulgar."

"Cathy," he spoke doubtfully; "I don't know if you *know* what you are asking me to say. Now, mind you, I am not responsible if you don't like it. First of all, you make wretched puns, and then you accuse me of being vulgarly dressed, or at least my feet are vulgarly dressed, and you expect me to sparkle with epigrams."

"No, I don't," she said, and she turned her head away.

"You aren't expecting what I *am* going to tell you anyhow," he said triumphantly. "Cathy, I'm going to be married. At least, I hope so."

She did not stir, nor did she speak for a moment, and when at last she did, so much of the happiness had died out of her voice that it hardly sounded like Cathy.

"You and Twyford," she said, still with averted head. "I feel like a grandmother. But I'm very *glad,* Robert." She turned, and put her hands in his.

"Don't you want to know who she is?" he asked. "She doesn't know herself yet and the biggest surprise is still to come. You see, Cath, she may refuse me."

"I don't see why she should," Cathy said slowly, and then she raised her swimming eyes, and her whole face flooded with colour, and she pulled her hands away.

"You have guessed," he said, suddenly catching her into his arms. "What is it to be? Cathy—Cathy—Well, Cathy?"

The End

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